PLAYS

FOURTH SERIES

A BIT O' LOVE
THE FOUNDATIONS
THE SKIN GAME

JOHN
GALSWORTHY

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A BIT O' LOVE
THE FOUNDATIONS
THE SKIN GAME

MOODS, SONGS, AND DOGGERELS
MEMORIES. Illustrated.

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THE FOUNDATIONS
THE SKIN GAME

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To

H. W. MASSINGHAM

20281

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

Michael Strangway
Beatrice Strangway
Mrs. Bradmere
Jim Bere
Jack Cremer
Mrs. Burlacombe
Burlacombe
Trustaford
Jarland
Clyst
Freman
Godleigh
Sol Potter
Morse, and Others

Ivy Burlacombe
Connie Trustaford
Gladys Freman
Mercy Jarland
Tibby Jarland
Bobbie Jarland

SCENE: A VILLAGE OF THE WEST

The Action passes on Ascension Day.

ACT I. STRANGWAY'S *rooms at* BURLACOMBE'S. ***Morning.***

ACT II.
- *SCENE I. The Village Inn.*
- *SCENE II. The same.*
- *SCENE III. Outside the church.*

ACT III.
- *SCENE I.* STRANGWAY'S *rooms.*
- *SCENE II.* BURLACOMBE'S *barn.*

} ***Evening.***

A BIT O' LOVE

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

ACT I

It is Ascension Day in a village of the West. In the low panelled hall-sittingroom of the BURLACOMBES' *farmhouse on the village green,* MICHAEL STRANGWAY, *a clerical collar round his throat and a dark Norfolk jacket on his back, is playing the flute before a very large framed photograph of a woman, which is the only picture on the walls. His age is about thirty-five; his figure thin and very upright and his clean-shorn face thin, upright, narrow, with long and rather pointed ears; his dark hair is brushed in a coxcomb off his forehead. A faint smile hovers about his lips that Nature has made rather full and he has made thin, as though keeping a hard secret; but his bright grey eyes, dark round the rim, look out and upwards almost as if he were being crucified. There is something about the whole of him that makes him seen not quite present. A gentle creature, burnt within.*

A low, broad window above a window-seat forms the background to his figure; and through its lattice panes are seen the outer gate and yew-trees of a churchyard and the porch of a church, bathed in May sunlight. The front door at right angles to the

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window-seat, leads to the village green, and a door on the left into the house.

It is the third movement of Veracini's violin sonata that STRANGWAY *plays. His back is turned to the door into the house, and he does not hear when it is opened, and* IVY BURLACOMBE, *the farmer's daughter, a girl of fourteen, small and quiet as a mouse, comes in, a prayer-book in one hand, and in the other a glass of water, with wild orchis and a bit of deep pink hawthorn. She sits down on the window-seat, and having opened her book, sniffs at the flowers. Coming to the end of the movement* STRANGWAY *stops, and looking up at the face on the wall, heaves a long sigh.*

IVY. [*From the seat*] I picked these for yü, Mr. Strangway.

STRANGWAY. [*Turning with a start*] Ah! Ivy. Thank you. [*He puts his flute down on a chair against the far wall*] Where are the others?

As he speaks, GLADYS FREMAN, *a dark gipsyish girl, and* CONNIE TRUSTAFORD, *a fair, stolid, blue-eyed Saxon, both about sixteen, come in through the front door, behind which they have evidently been listening. They too have prayer-books in their hands. They sidle past* IVY, *and also sit down under the window.*

GLADYS. Mercy's comin', Mr. Strangway.

STRANGWAY. Good morning, Gladys; good morning, Connie.

He turns to a book-case on a table against the far wall, and taking out a book, finds his place in it. While he stands thus with his back to the girls, MERCY JARLAND *comes in from the green. She also is about sixteen, with fair hair and china-blue eyes. She glides in quickly, hiding something behind her, and sits down on the seat next the door. And at once there is a whispering.*

STRANGWAY. [*Turning to them*] Good morning, Mercy.

MERCY. Good morning, Mr. Strangway.

STRANGWAY. Now, yesterday I was telling you what our Lord's coming meant to the world. I want you to understand that before He came there wasn't really love, as we know it. I don't mean to say that there weren't many good people; but there wasn't love for the sake of loving. D'you think you understand what I mean?

MERCY *fidgets.* GLADYS'S *eyes are following a fly.*

IVY. Yes, Mr. Strangway.

STRANGWAY. It isn't enough to love people because they're good to you, or because in some way or other you're going to get something by it. We have to love because we love loving. That's the great thing—without that we're nothing but Pagans.

GLADYS. Please, what is Pagans?

STRANGWAY. That's what the first Christians called the people who lived in the villages and were not yet Christians, Gladys.

MERCY. We live in a village, but we're Christians.

STRANGWAY. [*With a smile*] Yes, Mercy; and what is a Christian?

MERCY *kicks a foot sideways against her neighbour, frowns over her china-blue eyes, is silent; then, as his question passes on, makes a quick little face, wriggles, and looks behind her.*

STRANGWAY. Ivy?

IVY. 'Tis a man—whü—whü——

STRANGWAY. Yes?—Connie?

CONNIE [*Who speaks rather thickly, as if she had a permanent slight cold*] Please, Mr. Strangway, 'tis a man whü goes to church.

GLADYS. He 'as to be baptized—and confirmed; and—and—buried.

IVY. 'Tis a man whü—whü's güde and——

GLADYS. He don't drink, an' he don't beat his horses, an' he don't hit back.

MERCY. [*Whispering*] 'Tisn't your turn. [*To* STRANGWAY] 'Tis a man like us.

IVY. I know what Mrs. Strangway said it was, 'cause I asked her once, before she went away.

STRANGWAY. [*Startled*] Yes?

IVY. She said it was a man whü forgave everything.

STRANGWAY. Ah!

The note of a cuckoo comes travelling. The girls are gazing at STRANGWAY, *who seems to have gone off into a dream. They begin to fidget and whisper.*

CONNIE. Please, Mr. Strangway, father says if yü hit a man and he don't hit yü back, he's no güde at all.

MERCY. When Tommy Morse wouldn't fight, us pinched him—he did squeal! [*She giggles*] Made me laugh!

STRANGWAY. Did I ever tell you about St. Francis of Assisi?

IVY. [*Clasping her hands*] No.

STRANGWAY. Well, *he* was the best Christian, I think, that ever lived—simply full of love and joy.

IVY. I expect he's dead.

STRANGWAY. About seven hundred years, Ivy.

IVY. [*Softly*] Oh!

STRANGWAY. Everything to him was brother or sister—the sun and the moon, and all that was poor and weak and sad, and animals and birds, so that they even used to follow him about.

MERCY. I know! He had crumbs in his pocket.

STRANGWAY. No; he had love in his eyes.

IVY. 'Tis like about Orpheus, that yü told us.

STRANGWAY. Ah! But St. Francis was a Christian, and Orpheus was a Pagan.

IVY. Oh!

STRANGWAY. Orpheus drew everything after him with music; St. Francis by love.

IVY. Perhaps it was the same, really.

STRANGWAY. [*Looking at his flute*] Perhaps it was, Ivy.

GLADYS. Did 'e 'ave a flute like yü?

IVY. The flowers smell sweeter when they 'ear music; they dü.

[*She holds up the glass of flowers.*

STRANGWAY. [*Touching one of the orchis*] What's the name of this one?

The girls cluster, save MERCY, *who is taking a stealthy interest in what she has behind her.*

CONNIE. We call it a cuckoo, Mr. Strangway.

GLADYS. 'Tis awful common down by the streams. We've got one medder where 'tis so thick almost as the goldie cups.

STRANGWAY. Odd! I've never noticed it.

IVY. Please, Mr. Strangway, yü don't notice when yü're walkin'; yü go along like this.

[*She holds up her face as one looking at the sky.*

STRANGWAY. Bad as that, Ivy?

IVY. Mrs. Strangway often used to pick it last spring.

STRANGWAY. Did she? Did she?

[*He has gone off again into a kind of dream.*

MERCY. I like being confirmed.

STRANGWAY. Ah! Yes. Now— What's that behind you, Mercy?

MERCY. [*Engagingly producing a cage a little bigger than a mouse-trap, containing a skylark*] My skylark.

STRANGWAY. What!

MERCY. It can fly; but we're goin' to clip its wings. Bobbie caught it.

STRANGWAY. How long ago?

MERCY. [*Conscious of impending disaster*] Yesterday.

STRANGWAY. [*White hot*] Give me the cage!

MERCY. [*Puckering*] I want my skylark. [*As he steps up to her and takes the cage—thoroughly alarmed*] I gave Bobbie thrippence for it!

STRANGWAY. [*Producing a sixpence*] There!

MERCY. [*Throwing it down—passionately*] I want my skylark!

STRANGWAY. God made this poor bird for the sky and the grass. And you put it in *that!* Never cage any wild thing! Never!

MERCY. [*Faint and sullen*] I want my skylark.

STRANGWAY. [*Taking the cage to the door*] No! [*He holds up the cage and opens it*] Off you go, poor thing!

[*The bird flies out and away.*

The girls watch with round eyes the fling up of his arm, and the freed bird flying away.

IVY. I'm glad!

MERCY *kicks her viciously and sobs.* STRANGWAY *comes from the door, looks at* MERCY *sobbing, and suddenly clasps his head. The girls watch him with a queer mixture of wonder, alarm, and disapproval.*

GLADYS. [*Whispering*] Don't cry, Mercy. Bobbie'll soon catch yü another.

STRANGWAY *has dropped his hands, and is looking again at* MERCY. IVY *sits with hands clasped, gazing at* STRANGWAY. MERCY *continues her artificial sobbing.*

STRANGWAY. [*Quietly*] The class is over for to-day.

He goes up to MERCY, *and holds out his hand. She does not take it, and runs out knuckling her eyes.* STRANGWAY *turns on his heel and goes into the house.*

CONNIE. 'Twasn't his bird.

IVY. Skylarks belong to the sky. Mr. Strangway said so.

GLADYS. Not when they'm caught, they don't.

IVY. They dü.

CONNIE. 'Twas her bird.

IVY. He gave her sixpence for it.

GLADYS. She didn't take it.

CONNIE. There it is on the ground.

IVY. She might have.

GLADYS. He'll p'raps take my squirrel, tü.

IVY. The bird sang—I 'eard it! Right up in the sky. It wouldn't have sanged if it weren't glad.

GLADYS. Well, Mercy cried.

IVY. I don't care.

GLADYS. 'Tis a shame! And I know something. Mrs. Strangway's at Durford.

CONNIE. She's—never!

GLADYS. I saw her yesterday. An' if she's there

she ought to be here. I told mother, an' she said: "Yü mind yer business." An' when she goes in to market to-morrow she'm goin' to see. An' if she's really there, mother says, 'tis a fine tü-dü an' a praaper scandal. So *I* know a lot more'n yü dü.

[IVY *stares at her.*

CONNIE. Mrs. Strangway told mother she was goin' to France for the winter because her mother was ill.

GLADYS. 'Tisn't winter now—Ascension Day. I saw her comin' out o' Dr. Desart's house. I know 'twas her because she had on a blue dress an' a proud lüke. Mother says the doctor come over here tü often before Mrs. Strangway went away, just afore Christmas. They was old sweethearts before she married Mr. Strangway. [*To* IVY] 'Twas yüre mother told mother that.

[IVY *gazes at them more and more wide-eyed.*

CONNIE. Father says if Mrs. Bradmere an' the old Rector knew about the doctor, they wouldn't 'ave Mr. Strangway 'ere for curate any longer; because mother says it takes more'n a year for a güde wife to leave her 'usband, an' 'e so fond of her. But 'tisn't no business of ours, father says.

GLADYS. Mother says so tü. She's praaper set against gossip. She'll know all about it to-morrow after market.

IVY. [*Stamping her foot*] I don't want to 'ear nothin' at all; I don't, an' I won't.

[*A rather shame-faced silence falls on the girls.*

GLADYS. [*In a quick whisper*] 'Ere's Mrs. Burlacombe.

There enters from the house a stout motherly woman with a round grey eye and very red cheeks.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Ivy, take Mr. Strangway his ink, or we'll never 'ave no sermon to-night. He'm in his thinkin' box, but 'tis not a bit o' yüse 'im thinkin' without 'is ink. [*She hands her daughter an inkpot and blotting-pad.* IVY *Takes them and goes out*] Whatever's this? [*She picks up the little bird-cage.*

GLADYS. 'Tis Mercy Jarland's. Mr. Strangway let her skylark go.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Aw! Did 'e now? Serve 'er right, bringin' an 'eathen bird to confirmation class.

CONNIE. I'll take it to her.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. No. Yü leave it there, an' let Mr. Strangway dü what 'e likes with it. Bringin' a bird like that! Well I never!

The girls, perceiving that they have lighted on stony soil, look at each other and slide towards the door.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Yes, yü just be off, an' think on what yü've been told in class, an' be'ave like Christians, that's güde maids. An' don't yü come no more in the 'avenin's dancin' them 'eathen dances in my barn, naighther, till after yü'm confirmed—'tisn't right. I've told Ivy I won't 'ave it.

CONNIE. Mr. Strangway don't mind—he likes us

to; 'twas Mrs. Strangway began teachin' us. He's goin' to give a prize.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Yü just dü what I tell yü an' never mind Mr. Strangway—he'm tü kind to everyone. D'yü think I don't know how gells oughter be'ave before confirmation? Yü be'ave like I did! Now, goo ahn! Shoo!

She hustles them out, rather as she might hustle her chickens, and begins tidying the room. There comes a wandering figure to the open window. It is that of a man of about thirty-five, of feeble gait, leaning the weight of all one side of him on a stick. His dark face, with black hair, one lock of which has gone white, was evidently once that of an ardent man. Now it is slack, weakly smiling, and the brown eyes are lost, and seem always to be asking something to which there is no answer.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [*With that forced cheerfulness always assumed in the face of too great misfortune*] Well, Jim! better? [*At the faint brightening of the smile*] That's right! Yü'm gettin' on bravely. Want Parson?

JIM. [*Nodding and smiling, and speaking slowly*] I want to tell 'un about my cat.

[*His face loses its smile.*

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Why! what's she been düin' then? Mr. Strangway's busy. Won't I dü?

JIM. [*Shaking his head*] No. I want to tell *him.*

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Whatever she been düin'? Havin' kittens?

JIM. No. She'm lost.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Dearie me! Aw! she'm not lost. Cats be like maids; they must get out a bit.

JIM. She'm lost. Maybe he'll know where she'll be.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Well, well. I'll go an' find 'im.

JIM. He's a güde man. He's very güde.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. That's certain zure.

STRANGWAY. [*Entering from the house*] Mrs. Burlacombe, I can't think where I've put my book on St. Francis—the large, squarish pale-blue one?

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Aw! there now! I knü there was somethin' on me mind. Miss Willis she came in yesterday afternüne when yü was out, to borrow it. Oh! yes—I said—I'm zure Mr. Strangway'll lend it 'ee. Now think o' that!

STRANGWAY. Of course, Mrs. Burlacombe; very glad she's got it.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Aw! but that's not all. When I tuk it up there come out a whole flutter o' little bits o' paper wi' little rhymes on 'em, same as I see yü writin'. Aw! my güdeness! I says to meself, Mr. Strangway widn' want no one seein' them.

STRANGWAY. Dear me! No; certainly not!

MRS. BURLACOMBE. An' so I putt 'em in your secretary.

STRANGWAY. My—ah! Yes. Thank you; yes.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. But I'll goo over an' get the büke for yü. 'T won't take me 'alf a minit.

She goes out on to the green. JIM BERE *has come in.*

STRANGWAY. [*Gently*] Well, Jim?

JIM. My cat's lost.

STRANGWAY. Lost?

JIM. Day before yesterday. She'm not come back. They've shot 'er, I think; or she'm caught in one o' they rabbit-traps.

STRANGWAY. Oh! no; my dear fellow, she'll come back. I'll speak to Sir Herbert's keepers.

JIM. Yes, zurr. I feel lonesome without 'er.

STRANGWAY. [*With a faint smile—more to himself than to* JIM] Lonesome! Yes! That's bad, Jim! That's bad!

JIM. I miss 'er when I sits thar in the avenin'.

STRANGWAY. The evenings— They're the worst— and when the blackbirds sing in the morning.

JIM. She used to lie on my bed, ye know, zurr. [STRANGWAY *turns his face away, contracted with pain*] She'm like a Christian.

STRANGWAY. The beasts are.

JIM. There's plenty folk ain't 'alf as Christian as 'er be.

STRANGWAY. Well, dear Jim, I'll do my very best. And any time you're lonely, come up, and I'll play the flute to you.

JIM. [*Wriggling slightly*] No, zurr. Thank 'ee, zurr.

STRANGWAY. What—don't you like music?

JIM. Ye-es, zurr. [*A figure passes the window. Seeing it he says with his slow smile:* "'Ere's Mrs.

Bradmere, comin' from the Rectory." [*With queer malice*] She don't like cats. But she'm a cat 'erself, I think.

STRANGWAY. [*With his smile*] Jim!

JIM. She'm always tellin' me I'm lükin' better. I'm not better, zurr.

STRANGWAY. That's her kindness.

JIM. I don't think it is. 'Tis laziness, an' 'avin' 'er own way. She'm very fond of 'er own way.

A knock on the door cuts off his speech. Following closely on the knock, as though no doors were licensed to be closed against her, a grey-haired lady enters; a capable, brown-faced woman of seventy, whose every tone and movement exhales authority. With a nod and a "good morning" to STRANGWAY *she turns at once to* JIM BERE.

MRS. BRADMERE. Ah! Jim; you're looking better.

[JIM BERE *shakes his head.*

MRS. BRADMERE. Oh! yes, you are. Getting on splendidly. And now, I just want to speak to Mr. Strangway.

JIM BERE *touches his forelock, and slowly, leaning on his stick, goes out.*

MRS. BRADMERE. [*Waiting for the door to close*] You know how that came on him? Caught the girl he was engaged to, one night, with another man, the rage broke something here. [*She touches her forehead*] Four years ago.

STRANGWAY. Poor fellow!

MRS. BRADMERE. [*Looking at him sharply*] Is your wife back?

STRANGWAY. [*Starting*] No.

MRS. BRADMERE. By the way, poor Mrs. Cremer—is she any better?

STRANGWAY. No; going fast. Wonderful—so patient.

MRS. BRADMERE. [*With gruff sympathy*] Um! Yes. They know how to die! [*With another sharp look at him*] D'you expect your wife soon?

STRANGWAY. I—I—hope so.

MRS. BRADMERE. So do I. The sooner the better.

STRANGWAY. [*Shrinking*] I trust the Rector's not suffering so much this morning?

MRS. BRADMERE. Thank you! His foot's very bad.

As she speaks MRS. BURLACOMBE *returns with a large pale-blue book in her hand.*

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Good day, M'm! [*Taking the book across to* STRANGWAY] Miss Willis, she says she'm very sorry, zurr.

STRANGWAY. She was very welcome, Mrs. Burlacombe. [*To* MRS. BRADMERE] Forgive me—my sermon. [*He goes into the house.*

The two women gaze after him. Then, at once, as it were, draw into themselves, as if preparing for an encounter, and yet seem to expand as if losing the need for restraint.

MRS. BRADMERE. [*Abruptly*] He misses his wife very much, I'm afraid.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Ah! Don't he? Poor dear man; he keeps a terrible tight 'and over 'imself, but

'tis suthin' cruel the way he walks about at night. He'm just like a cow when its calf's weaned. 'T'as gone to me 'eart truly to see 'im these months past. T'other day when I went up to dü his rüme, I yeard a noise like this [*she sniffs*]; an' ther' 'e was at the wardrobe, snuffin' at 'er things. I did never think a man cud care for a woman so much as that.

MRS. BRADMERE. H'm!

MRS. BURLACOMBE. 'Tis funny rest—an' 'e comin' 'ere for quiet after that tearin' great London parish! 'E'm terrible absent-minded tü—don't take no interest in 'is füde. Yesterday, goin' on for one o'clock, 'e says to me, "I expect 'tis nearly breakfast-time, Mrs. Burlacombe!" 'E'd 'ad it twice already!

MRS. BRADMERE. Twice! Nonsense!

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Zurely! I give 'im a nummit afore 'e gets up; an' 'e 'as 'is brekjus reg'lar at nine. Must feed un up. He'm on 'is feet all day, goin' to zee folk that widden want to zee an angel, they'm that busy; an' when 'e comes in 'e'll play 'is flüte there. He'm wastin' away for want of 'is wife. That's what 'tis. An' 'im so sweet-spoken, tü, 'tes a pleasure to year 'im— Never says a word!

MRS. BRADMERE. Yes, that's the kind of man who gets treated badly. I'm afraid she's not worthy of him, Mrs. Burlacombe.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [*Plaiting her apron*] 'Tesn't for me to zay that. She'm a very pleasant lady.

MRS. BRADMERE. Too pleasant. What's this story about her being seen in Durford?

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Aw! I dü never year no gossip, m'm.

MRS. BRADMERE. [*Drily*] Of course not! But you see the Rector wishes to know.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [*Flustered*] Well—folk will talk! But, as I says to Burlacombe—"'Tes paltry," I says; and they only married eighteen months, and Mr. Strangway so devoted-like. 'Tes nothing but love, with 'im.

MRS. BRADMERE. Come!

MRS. BURLACOMBE. There's puzzivantin' folk as'll set an' gossip the feathers off an angel. But I dü never listen.

MRS. BRADMERE. Now then, Mrs. Burlacombe?

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Well, they dü say as how Dr. Desart over to Durford and Mrs. Strangway was sweethearts afore she wer' married.

MRS. BRADMERE. I knew that. Who was it saw her coming out of Dr. Desart's house yesterday?

MRS. BURLACOMBE. In a manner of spakin' 'tes Mrs. Freman that says 'er Gladys seen her.

MRS. BRADMERE. That child's got an eye like a hawk.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. 'Tes wonderful how things dü spread. 'Tesn't as if us gossiped. Dü seem to grow-like in the naight.

MRS. BRADMERE. [*To herself*] I never liked her. That Riviera excuse, Mrs. Burlacombe— Very convenient things, sick mothers. Mr. Strangway doesn't know?

MRS. BURLACOMBE. The Lord forbid! 'Twid send un crazy, I think. For all he'm so moony an' gentle-like, I think he'm a terrible passionate man inside. He've a-got a saint in 'im, for zure; but 'tes only 'alf-baked, in a manner of spakin'.

MRS. BRADMERE. I shall go and see Mrs. Freman. There's been too much of this gossip all the winter.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. 'Tes unfortunate-like 'tes the Fremans. Freman he'm a gipsy sort of a feller; and he've never forgiven Mr. Strangway for spakin' to 'im about the way he trates 'is 'orses.

MRS. BRADMERE. Ah! I'm afraid Mr. Strangway's not too discreet when his feelings are touched.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. 'E've a-got an 'eart so big as the full müne. But 'tes no yüse expectin' tü much o' this world. 'Tes a funny place, after that.

MRS. BRADMERE. Yes, Mrs. Burlacombe; and I shall give some of these good people a rare rap over the knuckles for their want of charity. For all they look as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths, they're an un-Christian lot. [*Looking very directly at* MRS. BURLACOMBE] It's lucky we've some hold over the village. I'm not going to have scandal. I shall speak to Sir Herbert, and he and the Rector will take steps.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [*With covert malice*] Aw! I dü hope 'twon't upset the Rector, an' 'is füte so poptious!

MRS. BRADMERE. [*Grimly*] His foot'll be sound

enough to come down sharp. By the way, will you send me a duck up to the Rectory?

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [*Glad to get away*] Zurely, m'm; at once. I've some luv'ly fat birds.

[*She goes into the house.*

MRS. BRADMERE. Old puss-cat!

She turns to go, and in the doorway encounters a very little, red-cheeked girl in a peacock-blue cap, and pink frock, who curtsies stolidly.

MRS. BRADMERE. Well, Tibby Jarland, what do you want here? Always sucking something, aren't you?

Getting no reply from TIBBY JARLAND, *she passes out.* TIBBY *comes in, looks round, takes a large sweet out of her mouth, contemplates it, and puts it back again. Then, in a perfunctory and very stolid fashion, she looks about the floor, as if she had been told to find something. While she is finding nothing and sucking her sweet, her sister* MERCY *comes in furtively, still frowning and vindictive.*

MERCY. What! Haven't you found it, Tibby? Get along with 'ee, then!

She accelerates the stolid TIBBY'S *departure with a smack, searches under the seat, finds and picks up the deserted sixpence. Then very quickly she goes to the door. But it is opened before she reaches it, and, finding herself caught, she slips behind the chintz*

window-curtain. A woman has entered, who is clearly the original of the large photograph. She is not strictly pretty, but there is charm in her pale, resolute face, with its mocking lips, flexible brows, and greenish eyes, whose lids, square above them, have short, dark lashes. She is dressed in blue, and her fair hair is coiled up under a cap and motor-veil. She comes in swiftly, and closes the door behind her; becomes irresolute; then, suddenly deciding, moves towards the door into the house. MERCY *slips from behind her curtain to make off, but at that moment the door into the house is opened, and she has at once to slip back again into covert. It is* IVY *who has appeared.*

IVY. [*Amazed*] Oh! Mrs. Strangway!

Evidently disconcerted by this appearance, BEATRICE STRANGWAY *pulls herself together and confronts the child with a smile.*

BEATRICE. Well, Ivy—you've grown! You didn't expect me, did you?

IVY. No, Mrs. Strangway; but I hoped yü'd be comin' soon.

BEATRICE. Ah! Yes. Is Mr. Strangway in?

IVY. [*Hypnotized by those faintly smiling lips*] Yes—oh, yes! He's writin' his sermon in the little room. He *will* be glad!

BEATRICE. [*Going a little closer, and never taking*

her eyes off the child] Yes. Now, Ivy, will you do something for me?

IVY. [*Fluttering*] Oh, yes, Mrs. Strangway.

BEATRICE. Quite sure?

IVY. Oh, yes!

BEATRICE. Are you old enough to keep a secret?

IVY. [*Nodding*] I'm fourteen now.

BEATRICE. Well, then—I don't want anybody but Mr. Strangway to know I've been here; nobody, not even your mother. D'you understand?

IVY. [*Troubled*] No. Only, I *can* keep a secret.

BEATRICE. Mind, if anybody hears, it will hurt—Mr. Strangway.

IVY. Oh! I wouldn't—hurt—him. *Must* yü go away again? [*Trembling towards her*] I wish yü were goin' to stay. And perhaps some one *has* seen yü—They——

BEATRICE. [*Hastily*] No, no one. I came motoring; like this. [*She moves her veil to show how it can conceal her face*] And I came straight down the little lane, and through the barn, across the yard.

IVY. [*Timidly*] People dü see a lot.

BEATRICE. [*Still with that hovering smile*] I know, but— Now go and tell him quickly and quietly.

IVY. [*Stopping at the door*] Mother's pluckin' a duck. Only, please, Mrs. Strangway, if she comes in even after yü've gone, she'll know, because—because yü always have that particular nice scent.

BEATRICE. Thank you, my child. I'll see to that.

IVY *looks at her as if she would speak again,*

then turns suddenly, and goes out. BEATRICE'S *face darkens; she shivers. Taking out a little cigarette case, she lights a cigarette, and watches the puffs of smoke wreathe about her and die away. The frightened* MERCY *peers out, spying for a chance to escape. Then from the house* STRANGWAY *comes in. All his dreaminess is gone.*

STRANGWAY. Thank God! [*He stops at the look on her face*] I don't understand, though. I thought you were still out there.

BEATRICE. [*Letting her cigarette fall, and putting her foot on it*] No.

STRANGWAY. You're staying? Oh! Beatrice; come! We'll get away from here at once—as far, as far—anywhere you like. Oh! my darling—only come! If you knew——

BEATRICE. It's no good, Michael; I've tried and tried.

STRANGWAY. Not! Then, why—? Beatrice! You said, when you were right away—I've waited——

BEATRICE. I know. It's cruel—it's horrible. But I told you not to hope, Michael. I've done my best. All these months at Mentone, I've been wondering why I ever let you marry me—when that feeling wasn't dead!

STRANGWAY. You can't have come back just to leave me again?

BEATRICE. When you let me go out there with

mother I thought—I *did* think I would be able; and I *had* begun—and then—spring came!

STRANGWAY. Spring came here too! Never so—aching! Beatrice, can't you?

BEATRICE. I've something to say.

STRANGWAY. No! No! No!

BEATRICE. You see—I've—fallen.

STRANGWAY. Ah! [*In a voice sharpened by pain*] Why, in the name of mercy, come here to tell me that? Was *he* out there, then?

[*She shakes her head.*

BEATRICE. I came straight back to him.

STRANGWAY. To Durford?

BEATRICE. To the Crossway Hotel, miles out—in my own name. They don't know me there. I told you not to hope, Michael. I've done my best; I swear it.

STRANGWAY. My God!

BEATRICE. It was your God that brought us to live near *him!*

STRANGWAY. Why have you come to me like this?

BEATRICE. To know what you're going to do. Are you going to divorce me? We're in your power. Don't divorce me— Doctor and patient—you must know—it ruins him. He'll lose everything. He'd be disqualified, and he hasn't a penny without his work.

STRANGWAY. Why should I spare him?

BEATRICE. Michael, I came to beg. It's hard.

STRANGWAY. No; don't beg! I can't stand it.

BEATRICE. [*Recovering her pride*] What are you going to do, then? Keep us apart by the threat of a divorce? Starve us and prison us? Cage me up here with you? I'm not brute enough to ruin him.

STRANGWAY. Heaven!

BEATRICE. I never really stopped loving him. I never loved you, Michael.

STRANGWAY. [*Stunned*] Is that true? [BEATRICE *bends her head*] Never loved me? Not—that night—on the river—not——?

BEATRICE. [*Under her breath*] No.

STRANGWAY. Were you lying to me, then? Kissing me, and—hating me?

BEATRICE. One doesn't hate men like you; but it wasn't love.

STRANGWAY. Why did you tell me it was?

BEATRICE. Yes. That was the worst thing I've ever done.

STRANGWAY. Do you think I would have married you? I would have burned first! I never dreamed you didn't. I swear it!

BEATRICE. [*Very low*] Forget it!

STRANGWAY. Did *he* try to get you away from me? [BEATRICE *gives him a swift look*] Tell me the truth!

BEATRICE. No. It was—I—alone. But—he loves me.

STRANGWAY. One does not easily know love, it seems.

But her smile, faint, mysterious, pitying, is enough, and he turns away from her.

BEATRICE. It was cruel to come, I know. For me, too. But I couldn't write. I had to know.

STRANGWAY. Never loved me? *Never* loved me? That night at Tregaron? [*At the look on her face*] You might have told me before you went away! Why keep me all these——

BEATRICE. I meant to forget him again. I did mean to. I thought I could get back to what I was, when I married you; but, you see, what a girl can do, a woman that's been married—can't.

STRANGWAY. Then it was I—my kisses that—! [*He laughs*] How did you stand them? [*His eyes dart at her face*] Imagination helped you, perhaps!

BEATRICE. Michael, don't, don't! And—oh! don't make a public thing of it! You needn't be afraid I shall have too good a time! [*He stays quite still and silent, and that which is writhing in him makes his face so strange that* BEATRICE *stands aghast. At last she goes stumbling on in speech*] If ever you want to marry some one else—then, of course—that's only fair, ruin or not. But till then—till then— He's leaving Durford, going to Brighton. No one need know. And you—this isn't the only parish in the world.

STRANGWAY. [*Quietly*] You ask me to help you live in secret with another man?

BEATRICE. I ask for mercy.

STRANGWAY. [*As to himself*] What am I to do?

BEATRICE. What you feel in the bottom of your heart.

STRANGWAY. You ask me to help you live in sin?

BEATRICE. To let me go out of your life. You've only to do—nothing. [*He goes, slowly, close to her.*

STRANGWAY. I want you. Come back to me! Beatrice, come back!

BEATRICE. It would be torture, now.

STRANGWAY. [*Writhing*] Oh!

BEATRICE. Whatever's in your heart—do!

STRANGWAY. You'd come back to me sooner than ruin *him?* Would you?

BEATRICE. I can't bring him harm.

STRANGWAY. [*Turning away*] God!—if there be one —help me! [*He stands leaning his forehead against the window. Suddenly his glance falls on the little bird-cage, still lying on the window-seat*] Never cage any wild thing! [*He gives a laugh that is half a sob; then, turning to the door, says in a low voice*] Go! Go please, quickly! Do what you will. I won't hurt you—can't — But—go! [*He opens the door.*

BEATRICE. [*Greatly moved*] Thank you!

She passes him with her head down, and goes out quickly. STRANGWAY *stands unconsciously tearing at the little bird-cage. And while he tears at it he utters a moaning sound. The terrified* MERCY, *peering from behind the curtain, and watching her chance, slips to the still open door; but in her haste and fright she knocks against it, and* STRANGWAY *sees her. Before he can stop her she has fled out on to the green and away.*

While he stands there, paralysed, the door from the house is opened, and MRS. BURLACOMBE *approaches him in a queer, hushed way.*

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [*Her eyes mechanically fixed on the twisted bird-cage in his hands*] 'Tis poor Sue Cremer, zurr, I didn't 'ardly think she'd last thrü the mornin'. An' zure enough she'm passed away! [*Seeing that he has not taken in her words*] Mr. Strangway—yü'm feelin' giddy?

STRANGWAY. No, no! What was it? You said——

MRS. BURLACOMBE. 'Tes Jack Cremer. His wife's gone. 'E'm in a terrible way. 'Tes only yü, 'e ses, can dü 'im any güde. He'm in the kitchen.

STRANGWAY. Cremer? Yes! Of course. Let him——

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [*Still staring at the twisted cage*] Yü ain't wantin' that—'tes all twizzled. [*She takes it from him*] Sure yü'm not feelin' yer 'ead?

STRANGWAY. [*With a resolute effort*] No!

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [*Doubtfully*] I'll send 'im in, then. [*She goes.*

When she is gone, STRANGWAY *passes his handkerchief across his forehead, and his lips move fast. He is standing motionless when* CREMER, *a big man in labourer's clothes, with a thick, broad face, and tragic, faithful eyes, comes in, and stands a little in from the closed door, quite dumb.*

STRANGWAY. [*After a moment's silence—going up to*

him and laying a hand on his shoulder] Jack! Don't give way. If we give way—we're done.

CREMER. Yes, zurr. [*A quiver passes over his face.*

STRANGWAY. She didn't. Your wife was a brave woman. A dear woman.

CREMER. I never thought to lüse 'er. She never told me 'ow bad she was, afore she tuk to 'er bed. 'Tis a dreadful thing to lüse a wife, zurr.

STRANGWAY. [*Tightening his lips, that tremble*] Yes. But don't give way! Bear up, Jack!

CREMER. Seems funny 'er goin' blue-bell time, an' the sun shinin' so warm. I picked up an 'orse-shü yesterday. I can't never 'ave 'er back, zurr.

[*His face quivers again.*

STRANGWAY. Some day you'll join her. Think! Some lose their wives for ever.

CREMER. I don't believe as there's a future life, zurr. I think we goo to sleep like the beasts.

STRANGWAY. We're told otherwise. But come here! [*Drawing him to the window*] Look! Listen! To sleep in that! Even if we do, it won't be so bad, Jack, will it?

CREMER. She wer' a güde wife to me—no man cüdn't 'ave no better wife.

STRANGWAY. [*Putting his hand out*] Take hold—hard—harder! I want yours as much as you want mine. Pray for me, Jack, and I'll pray for you. And we won't give way, will we?

CREMER. [*To whom the strangeness of these words has given some relief*] No, zurr; thank 'ee, zurr. 'Tes

no güde, I expect. Only, I'll miss 'er. Thank 'ee, zurr; kindly.

He lifts his hand to his head, turns, and uncertainly goes out to the kitchen. And STRANGWAY *stays where he is, not knowing what to do. Then blindly he takes up his flute, and hatless, hurries out into the air.*

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I

About seven o'clock in the taproom of the village inn. The bar, with the appurtenances thereof, stretches across one end, and opposite is the porch door on to the green. The wall between is nearly all window, with leaded panes, one wide-open casement whereof lets in the last of the sunlight. A narrow bench runs under this broad window. And this is all the furniture, save three spittoons.

GODLEIGH, *the innkeeper, a smallish man with thick ruffled hair, a loquacious nose, and apple-red cheeks above a reddish-brown moustache, is reading the paper. To him enters* TIBBY JARLAND *with a shilling in her mouth.*

GODLEIGH. Well, Tibby Jarland, what've yü come for, then? Glass o' beer?

TIBBY *takes the shilling from her mouth and smiles stolidly.*

GODLEIGH. [*Twinkling*] I shid zay glass o' 'arf an' 'arf's about yüre form. [TIBBY *smiles more broadly*] Yü'm a praaper masterpiece. Well! 'Ave sister

Mercy borrowed yüre tongue? [TIBBY *shakes her head*] Aw, she 'aven't. Well, maid?

TIBBY. Father wants six clay pipes, please.

GODLEIGH. 'E dü, dü 'ee? Yü tell yüre father 'e can't 'ave more'n one, not this avenin'. And 'ere 'tis. Hand up yüre shillin'.

TIBBY *reaches up her hand, parts with the shilling, and receives a long clay pipe and eleven pennies. In order to secure the coins in her pinafore she places the clay pipe in her mouth. While she is still thus engaged,* MRS. BRADMERE *enters the porch and comes in.* TIBBY *curtsies stolidly.*

MRS. BRADMERE. Gracious, child! What are you doing here? And what have you got in your mouth? Who is it? Tibby Jarland? [TIBBY *curtsies again*] Take that thing out. And tell your father from me that if I ever see you at the inn again I shall tread on his toes hard. Godleigh, you know the law about children?

GODLEIGH. [*Cocking his eye, and not at all abashed*] Surely, m'm. But she will come. Go away, my dear.

TIBBY, *never taking her eyes off* MRS. BRADMERE, *or the pipe from her mouth, has backed stolidly to the door, and vanished.*

MRS. BRADMERE. [*Eyeing* GODLEIGH] Now, Godleigh, I've come to talk to you. Half the scandal that goes about the village begins here. [*She holds up her finger to check expostulation*] No, no—it's no

good. You know the value of scandal to your business far too well.

GODLEIGH. Wi' all respect, m'm, I knows the vally of it to yourn, tü.

MRS. BRADMERE. What do you mean by that?

GODLEIGH. If there weren't no Rector's lady there widden' be no notice taken o' scandal; an' if there weren't no notice taken, twidden be scandal, to my thinkin'.

MRS. BRADMERE. [*Winking out a grim little smile*] Very well! You've given me your views. Now for mine. There's a piece of scandal going about that's got to be stopped, Godleigh. You turn the tap of it off here, or we'll turn your tap off. You know me. See?

GODLEIGH. I shouldn' never presume, m'm, to know a lady.

MRS. BRADMERE. The Rector's quite determined, so is Sir Herbert. Ordinary scandal's bad enough, but this touches the Church. While Mr. Strangway remains curate here, there must be no talk about him and his affairs.

GODLEIGH. [*Cocking his eye*] I was just thinkin' how to dü it, m'm. 'Twid be a brave notion to putt the men in chokey, and slit the women's tongues-like, same as they dü in outlandish places, as I'm told.

MRS. BRADMERE. Don't talk nonsense, Godleigh; and mind what I say, because I mean it.

GODLEIGH. Make yüre mind aisy, m'm—there'll be no scandal-monkeyin' here wi' my permission.

MRS. BRADMERE *gives him a keen stare, but seeing him perfectly grave, nods her head with approval.*

MRS. BRADMERE. Good! You know what's being said, of course?

GODLEIGH. [*With respectful gravity*] Yü'll pardon me, m'm, but ef an' in case yü was goin' to tell me, there's a rüle in this 'ouse: "No scandal 'ere!"

MRS. BRADMERE. [*Twinkling grimly*] You're too smart by half, my man.

GODLEIGH. Aw fegs, no, m'm—child in yüre 'ands.

MRS. BRADMERE. I wouldn't trust you a yard. Once more, Godleigh! This is a Christian village, and we mean it to remain so. You look out for yourself.

The door opens to admit the farmers TRUSTAFORD *and* BURLACOMBE. *They doff their hats to* MRS. BRADMERE, *who, after one more sharp look at* GODLEIGH, *moves towards the door.*

MRS. BRADMERE. Evening, Mr. Trustaford. [*To* BURLACOMBE] Burlacombe, tell your wife that duck she sent up was in hard training.

With one of her grim winks, and a nod, she goes.

TRUSTAFORD. [*Replacing a hat which is black, hard, and not very new, on his long head, above a long face, clean-shaved but for little whiskers*] What's the old grey mare want, then? [*With a horse-laugh*] 'Er's lükin' awful wise!

GODLEIGH. [*Enigmatically*] Ah!

TRUSTAFORD. [*Sitting on the bench close to the bar*] Drop o' whisky, an' potash.

BURLACOMBE. [*A taciturn, slim, yellowish man, in a worn soft hat*] What's nüse, Godleigh? Drop o' cider.

GODLEIGH. Nüse? There's never no nüse in this 'ouse. Aw, no! Not wi' my permission. [*In imitation*] This is a Christian village.

TRUSTAFORD. Thought the old grey mare seemed mighty busy. [*To* BURLACOMBE] 'Tes rather quare about the curate's wife a-comin' motorin' this mornin'. Passed me wi' her face all smothered up in a veil, goggles an' all. Haw, haw!

BURLACOMBE. Aye!

TRUSTAFORD. Off again she was in 'alf an hour. 'Er didn't give poor old curate much of a chance, after six months.

GODLEIGH. Havin' an engagement elsewhere— No scandal, please, gentlemen.

BURLACOMBE. [*Acidly*] Never asked to see my missis. Passed me in the yard like a stone.

TRUSTAFORD. 'Tes a little bit rümoursome lately about 'er doctor.

GODLEIGH. Ah! he's the favourìte. But 'tes a dead secret, Mr. Trustaford. Don't yü never repate it— there's not a cat don't know it already!

BURLACOMBE *frowns, and* TRUSTAFORD *utters his laugh. The door is opened and* FREMAN,

a dark gipsyish man in the dress of a farmer, comes in.

GODLEIGH. Don't yü never tell Will Freman what 'e told me!

FREMAN. Avenin'!

TRUSTAFORD. Avenin', Will; what's yüre glass o' trouble?

FREMAN. Drop o' cider, clove, an' dash o' gin. There's blood in the sky to-night.

BURLACOMBE. Ah! We'll 'ave fine weather now, with the full o' the müne.

FREMAN. Dust o' wind an' a drop or tü, virst, I reckon. 'Eard t' nüse about curate an' 'is wife?

GODLEIGH. No, indeed; an' don't yü tell us. We'm Christians 'ere in this village.

FREMAN. 'Tain't no very Christian nüse, neither. He's sent 'er off to th' doctor. "Go an' live with un," 'e says; "my blessin' on ye." If 'er'd a-been mine, I'd 'a tuk the whip to 'er. Tam Jarland's maid, she yeard it all. Christian, indeed! That's brave Christianity! "Goo an' live with un!" 'e told 'er.

BURLACOMBE. No, no; that's not sense—a man to say that. I'll not 'ear that against a man that bides in my 'ouse.

FREMAN. 'Tes sure, I tell 'ee. The maid was hid-up, scared-like, behind the curtain. At it they went, and parson 'e says: "Go," 'e says, "I won't kape 'ee from 'im," 'e says, "an' I won't divorce 'ee, as yü don't wish it!" They was 'is words, same as Jarland's

maid told my maid, an' my maid told my missis. If that's parson's talk, 'tes funny work goin' to church.

TRUSTAFORD. [*Brooding*] 'Tes wonderful quare, zurely.

FREMAN. Tam Jarland's fair mad wi' curate for makin' free wi' his maid's skylark. Parson or no parson, 'e've no call to meddle wi' other people's praperty. He cam' pokin' 'is nose into my affairs. I told un I knew a sight more 'bout 'orses than 'e ever would!

TRUSTAFORD. He'm a bit crazy 'bout bastes an' birds.

They have been so absorbed that they have not noticed the entrance of CLYST, *a youth with tousled hair, and a bright, quick, Celtic eye, who stands listening, with a bit of paper in his hand.*

CLYST. Ah! he'm that zurely, Mr. Trustaford.

[*He chuckles.*

GODLEIGH. Now, Tim Clyst, if an' in case yü've a-got some scandal on yer tongue, don't yü never unship it here. Yü go up to Rectory where 'twill be more relished-like.

CLYST. [*Waving the paper*] Will y' give me a drink for thic, Mr. Godleigh? 'Tes rale funny. Aw! 'tes somethin' swate. Bütiful readin'. Poetry. Rale spice. Yü've a luv'ly voice for readin', Mr. Godleigh.

GODLEIGH. [*All ears and twinkle*] Aw, what is it then?

CLYST. Ah! Yü want t'know tü much.

[*Putting the paper in his pocket.*

While he is speaking, JIM BERE *has entered quietly, with his feeble step and smile, and sits down.*

CLYST. [*Kindly*] Hallo, Jim! Cat come 'ome?

JIM BERE. No.

All nod, and speak to him kindly. And JIM BERE *smiles at them, and his eyes ask of them the question, to which there is no answer. And after that he sits motionless and silent, and they talk as if he were not there.*

GODLEIGH. What's all this, now—no scandal in my 'ouse!

CLYST. 'Tes awful peculiar—like a drame. Mr. Burlacombe 'e don't like to hear tell about drames. A guess a won't tell 'ee, arter that.

FREMAN. Out wi' it, Tim.

CLYST. 'Tes powerful thirsty to-day, Mr. Godleigh.

GODLEIGH. [*Drawing him some cider*] Yü're all wild cat's talk, Tim; yü've a-got no tale at all.

CLYST. [*Moving for the cider*] Aw, indade!

GODLEIGH. No tale, no cider!

CLYST. Did ye ever year tell of Orphus?

TRUSTAFORD. What? The old vet.: up to Drayleigh?

CLYST. Fegs, no; Orphus that lived in th' old time, an' drawed the bastes after un wi' his music, same as curate was tellin' the maids.

FREMAN. I've 'eard as a gipsy over to Yellacott could dü that wi' 'is viddle.

CLYST. 'Twas no gipsy I see'd this arternüne; 'twas Orphus, down to Mr. Burlacombe's long medder; settin' there all dark on a stone among the dimsy-white flowers an' the cowflops, wi' a bird upon 'is 'ead, playin' his whistle to the ponies.

FREMAN. [*Excitedly*] Yü did never zee a man wi' a bird on 'is 'ead.

CLYST. Didn' I?

FREMAN. What sort o' bird, then? Yü tell me that.

TRUSTAFORD. Praaper old barndoor cock. Haw, haw!

GODLEIGH. [*Soothingly*] 'Tes a vairy-tale; us mustn't be tü partic'lar.

BURLACOMBE. In my long medder? Where were yü, then, Tim Clyst?

CLYST. Passin' down the lane on my bike. Wonderful sorrowful-fine music 'e played. The ponies they did come round 'e—yü cud zee the tears runnin' down their chakes; 'twas powerful sad. 'E 'adn't no 'at on.

FREMAN. [*Jeering*] No; 'e 'ad a bird on 'is 'ead.

CLYST. [*With a silencing grin*] He went on playin' an' playin'. The ponies they never müved. An' all the dimsy-white flowers they waved and waved, an' the wind it went over 'em. Gav' me a funny feelin'.

GODLEIGH. Clyst, yü take the cherry bun!

CLYST. Where's that cider, Mr. Godleigh?

GODLEIGH. [*Bending over the cider*] Yü've a -'ad tü much already, Tim.

The door is opened, and TAM JARLAND *appears. He walks rather unsteadily; a man with a heavy jowl, and sullen, strange, epileptic-looking eyes.*

CLYST. [*Pointing to* JARLAND] 'Tis Tam Jarland there 'as the cargo aboard.

JARLAND. Avenin', all! [*To* GODLEIGH] Pint o' beer. [*To* JIM BERE] Avenin', Jim.

[JIM BERE *looks at him and smiles.*

GODLEIGH. [*Serving him after a moment's hesitation*] 'Ere y'are, Tam. [*To* CLYST, *who has taken out his paper again*] Where'd yü get thiccy paper?

CLYST. [*Putting down his cider-mug empty*] Yüre tongue dü watter, don't it, Mr. Godleigh? [*Holding out his mug*] No zider, no poetry. 'Tis amazin' sorrowful; Shakespeare over again. "The boy stüde on the burnin' deck."

FREMAN. Yü and yer yap!

CLYST. Ah! Yü wait a bit. When I come back down t'lane again, Orphus 'e was vanished away; there was naught in the field but the ponies, an' a praaper old magpie, a-top o' the hedge. I zee somethin' white in the beak o' the fowl, so I giv' a "Whisht," an' 'e drops it smart, an' off 'e go. I gets over bank an' picks un up, and here't be.

[*He holds out his mug.*

BURLACOMBE. [*Tartly*] Here, give 'im 'is cider. Rade it yüreself, ye young teasewings.

CLYST, *having secured his cider, drinks it off. Holding up the paper to the light, he makes as if to begin, then slides his eye round, tantalizing.*

CLYST. 'Tes a pity I bain't dressed in a white gown, an' flowers in me 'air.

FREMAN. Read it, or we'll 'ave yü out o' this.

CLYST. Aw, don't 'ee shake my nerve, now!

He begins reading with mock heroism, in his soft, high, burring voice. Thus, in his rustic accent, go the lines:

God lighted the zun in 'eaven far,
Lighted the virefly an' the ztar.
My 'eart 'E lighted not!

God lighted the vields fur lambs to play,
Lighted the bright strames, 'an the may.
My 'eart 'E lighted not!

God lighted the müne, the Arab's way,
He lights to-morrer, an' to-day.
My 'eart 'E 'ath vorgot!

When he has finished, there is silence. Then TRUSTAFORD, *scratching his head, speaks:*

TRUSTAFORD. 'Tes amazin' funny stuff.

FREMAN. [*Looking over* CLYST'S *shoulder*] Be danged! 'Tes the curate's 'andwritin'. 'Twas curate wi' the ponies, after that.

CLYST. Fancy, now! Aw, Will Freman, an't yü bright!

FREMAN. But 'e 'adn't no bird on 'is 'ead.

CLYST. Ya-as, 'e 'ad.

JARLAND. [*In a dull, threatening voice*] 'E 'ad my maid's bird, this arternüne. 'Ead or no, and parson or no, I'll gie 'im one for that.

FREMAN. Ah! And 'e meddled wi' my 'orses.

TRUSTAFORD. I'm thinkin' 'twas an old cuckoo bird 'e 'ad on 'is 'ead. Haw, haw!

GODLEIGH. "His 'eart *she* 'ath vorgot!"

FREMAN. 'E's a fine one to be tachin' our maids convirmation.

GODLEIGH. Would ye 'ave it the old Rector then? Wi' 'is gouty shoe? Rackon the maids wid rather 'twas curate; eh, Mr. Burlacombe?

BURLACOMBE. [*Abruptly*] Curate's a güde man.

JARLAND. [*With the comatose ferocity of drink*] I'll be even wi' un.

FREMAN. [*Excitedly*] Tell 'ee one thing—'tes not a proper man o' God to 'ave about, wi' 'is lüse goin's on. Out vrom 'ere he oughter go.

BURLACOMBE. You med go further an' fare worse.

FREMAN. What's 'e düin', then, lettin' 'is wife run off?

TRUSTAFORD. [*Scratching his head*] If an' in case 'e can't kape 'er, 'tes a funny way o' düin' things not to divorce 'er, after that. If a parson's not to dü the Christian thing, whü is, then?

BURLACOMBE. 'Tes a bit immoral-like to pass over a thing like that. 'Tes funny if women's goin's on's to be encouraged.

FREMAN. Act of a coward, I zay.

BURLACOMBE. The curate ain't no coward.

FREMAN. He bides in yüre house; 'tes natural for yü to stand up for un; I'll wager *Mrs.* Burlacombe don't, though. My missis was fair shocked. "Will," she says, "if yü ever make vur to let me go like that, I widden never stay wi' yü," she says.

TRUSTAFORD. 'Tes settin' a bad example, for zure.

BURLACOMBE. 'Tes all very aisy talkin'; what shüde 'e dü, then?

FREMAN. [*Excitedly*] Go over to Durford and say to that doctor: "Yü come about my missis, an' zee what I'll dü to 'ee." An' take 'er 'ome an' zee she don't misbe'ave again.

CLYST. 'E can't take 'er ef 'er don' want t' come—I've 'eard lawyer, that lodged wi' us, say that.

FREMAN. All right then, 'e ought to 'ave the law of 'er and 'er doctor; an' zee 'er goin's on don't prosper; 'e'd get damages, tü. But this way 'tes a nice example he'm settin' folks. Parson indade! My missis an' the maids they won't goo near the church to-night, an' I wager no one else won't, neither.

JARLAND. [*Lurching with his pewter up to* GODLEIGH] The beggar! I'll be even wi' un.

GODLEIGH. [*Looking at him in doubt*] 'Tes the last, then, Tam.

Having received his beer, JARLAND *stands, leaning against the bar, drinking.*

BURLACOMBE. [*Suddenly*] I don' goo with what curate's düin'—'tes tü soft 'earted; he'm a müney kind o' man altogether, wi' 'is flute an' 'is poetry;

but he've a-lodged in my 'ouse this year an' more, and always 'ad an 'elpin' 'and for every one. I've got a likin' for him an' there's an end of it.

JARLAND. The coward!

TRUSTAFORD. I don' trouble nothin' about that, Tam Jarland. [*Turning to* BURLACOMBE] What gits me is 'e don't seem to 'ave no zense o' what's his own praperty.

JARLAND. Take other folk's property fast enough! [*He saws the air with his empty pewter. The others have all turned to him, drawn by the fascination that a man in liquor has for his fellow-men. The bell for church has begun to ring, the sun is down, and it is getting dusk.*] He wants one on his crop, an' one in 'is belly; 'e wants a man to take an' gie un a güde hidin'—zame as he oughter give 'is fly-be-night of a wife. [STRANGWAY *in his dark clothes has entered, and stands by the door, his lips compressed to a colourless line, his thin, darkish face grey-white*] Zame as a *man* wid ha' gi'en the doctor, for takin' what isn't his'n.

All but JARLAND *have seen* STRANGWAY. *He steps forward,* JARLAND *sees him now; his jaw drops a little, and he is silent.*

STRANGWAY. I came for a little brandy, Mr. Godleigh—feeling rather faint. Afraid I mightn't get through the service.

GODLEIGH. [*With professional composure*] Marteil's Three Star, zurr, or 'Ennessy's?

STRANGWAY. [*Looking at* JARLAND] Thank you; I believe I can do without, now. [*He turns to go.*

In the deadly silence, GODLEIGH *touches the arm of* JARLAND, *who, leaning against the bar with the pewter in his hand, is staring with his strange lowering eyes straight at* STRANGWAY.

JARLAND. [*Galvanized by the touch into drunken rage*] Lave me be—I'll talk to un—parson or no. I'll tache un to meddle wi' my maid's bird. I'll tache un to kape 'is thievin' 'ands to 'imself.

[STRANGWAY *turns again.*

CLYST. Be quiet, Tam.

JARLAND. [*Never loosing* STRANGWAY *with his eyes—like a bull-dog who sees red*] That's for one chake; zee un turn t'other, the white-livered büty! Whü lets another man 'ave 'is wife, an' never the sperit to go vor un!

BURLACOMBE. Shame, Jarland; quiet, man!

They are all looking at STRANGWAY, *who, under* JARLAND'S *drunken insults is standing rigid, with his eyes closed, and his hands hard clenched. The church bell has stopped slow ringing, and begun its five minutes' hurrying note.*

TRUSTAFORD. [*Rising, and trying to hook his arm into* JARLAND'S] Come away, Tam; yü've a-'ad tü much, man.

JARLAND. [*Shaking him off*] Zee, 'e darsen't touch me; I might 'it un in the vace an' 'e darsen't; 'e's afraid—like 'e was o' the doctor.

He raises the pewter as though to fling it, but

it is seized by GODLEIGH *from behind, and falls clattering to the floor.* STRANGWAY *has not moved.*

JARLAND. [*Shaking his fist almost in his face*] Lüke at un, lüke at un! A man wi' a slut for a wife——

As he utters the word "wife" STRANGWAY *seizes the outstretched fist, and with a jujitsu movement, draws him into his clutch, helpless. And as they sway and struggle in the open window, with the false strength of fury he forces* JARLAND *through. There is a crash of broken glass from outside. At the sound* STRANGWAY *comes to himself. A look of agony passes over his face. His eyes light on* JIM BERE, *who has suddenly risen, and stands feebly clapping his hands.* STRANGWAY *rushes out.*

Excitedly gathering at the window, they all speak at once.

CLYST. Tam's hatchin' of yüre cucumbers, Mr. Godleigh.

TRUSTAFORD. 'E did crash; haw, haw!

FREMAN. 'Twas a brave throw, zürely. Whü wid a' thought it?

CLYST. Tam's crawlin' out. [*Leaning through window*] Hallo, Tam—'ow's t' base, old man?

FREMAN. [*Excitedly*] They'm all comin' up from churchyard to zee.

TRUSTAFORD. Tam dü lüke wonderful aztonished; haw, haw! Poor old Tam!

CLYST. Can yü zee curate? Rackon 'e'm gone into church. Aw, yes; gettin' a bit dimsy—sarvice time. [*A moment's hush.*

TRUSTAFORD. Well, I'm jiggered. In 'alf an hour he'm got to prache.

GODLEIGH. 'Tes a Christian village, boys.

Feebly, quietly, JIM BERE *laughs. There is silence; but the bell is heard still ringing.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE II

The same—in daylight dying fast. A lamp is burning on the bar. A chair has been placed in the centre of the room, facing the bench under the window, on which are seated from right to left, GODLEIGH, SOL POTTER *the village shopman,* TRUSTAFORD, BURLACOMBE, FREMAN, JIM BERE, *and* MORSE *the blacksmith.* CLYST *is squatting on a stool by the bar, and at the other end* JARLAND, *sobered and lowering, leans against the lintel of the porch leading to the door, round which are gathered five or six sturdy fellows, dumb as fishes. No one sits*

in the chair. In the unnatural silence that reigns, the distant sound of the wheezy church organ and voices singing can be heard.

TRUSTAFORD. [*After a prolonged clearing of his throat*] What I mean to zay is that 'tes no yüse, not a bit o' yüse in the world, not düin' of things properly. If an' in case we'm to carry a resolution disapprovin' o' curate, it must all be done so as no one can't zay nothin'.

SOL POTTER. That's what I zay, Mr. Trustaford; ef so be as 'tis to be a village meetin', then it must be all done proper.

FREMAN. That's right, Sol Potter. I purpose Mr. Sol Potter into the chair. Whü seconds that?

A silence. Voices from among the dumb-as-fishes: "I dü."

CLYST. [*Excitedly*] Yü can't putt that to the meetin'. Only a chairman can putt it to the meetin'. I purpose that Mr. Burlacombe—bein' as how he's chairman o' the Parish Council—take the chair.

FREMAN. Ef so be as I can't putt it, yü can't putt that neither.

TRUSTAFORD. 'Tes not a bit o' yüse; us can't 'ave no meetin' without a chairman.

GODLEIGH. Us can't 'ave no chairman without a meetin' to elect un, that's züre. [*A silence.*

MORSE. [*Heavily*] To my way o' thinkin', Mr. Godleigh speaks zense; us must 'ave a meetin' before us can 'ave a chairman.

CLYST. Then what we got to dü's to elect a meetin'.

BURLACOMBE. [*Sourly*] Yü'll not find no procedure for that.

Voices from among the dumb-as-fishes: "Mr. Burlacombe 'e oughter know."

SOL POTTER. [*Scratching his head—with heavy solemnity*] 'Tes my belief there's no other way to dü, but to elect a chairman to call a meetin'; an' then for that meetin' to elect a chairman.

CLYST. I purpose Mr. Burlacombe as chairman to call a meetin'.

FREMAN. I purpose Sol Potter.

GODLEIGH. Can't 'ave tü propositions together before a meetin'; that's apple-pie züre vur zurtain.

Voice from among the dumb-as-fishes: "There ain't no meetin' yet, Sol Potter zays."

TRUSTAFORD. Us must get the rights of it zettled some'ow. 'Tes like the darned old chicken an' the egg—meetin' or chairman—which come virst?

SOL POTTER. [*Conciliating*] To my thinkin' there shid be another way o' düin' it, to get round it like with a circumbendibus. 'T'all comes from takin' different vüse, in a manner o' spakin'.

FREMAN. Yü goo an' zet in that chair.

SOL POTTER. [*With a glance at* BURLACOMBE—*modestly*] I shid'n never like fur to dü that, with Mr. Burlacombe zettin' there.

BURLACOMBE. [*Rising*] 'Tes all darned fülishness.

Amidst an uneasy shufflement of feet he moves to the door, and goes out into the darkness.

CLYST. [*Seeing his candidate thus depart*] Rackon curate's pretty well thrü by now, I'm goin' to zee. [*As he passes* JARLAND] 'Ow's ta base, old man?

[*He goes out.*

One of the dumb-as-fishes moves from the door and fills the space left on the bench by BURLACOMBE'S *departure.*

JARLAND. Darn all this puzzivantin'! [*To* SOL POTTER] Goo an' zet in that chair.

SOL POTTER. [*Rising and going to the chair; there he stands, changing from one to the other of his short broad feet and sweating from modesty and worth*] 'Tes my düty now, gentlemen, to call a meetin' of the parishioners of this parish. I beg therefore to declare that this is a meetin' in accordance with my düty as chairman of this meetin' which elected me chairman to call this meetin'. And I purceed to vacate the chair so that this meetin' may now purceed to elect a chairman.

He gets up from the chair, and wiping the sweat from his brow, goes back to his seat.

FREMAN. Mr. Chairman, I rise on a point of order.

GODLEIGH. There ain't no chairman.

FREMAN. I don't give a darn for that. I rise on a point of order.

GODLEIGH. 'Tes a chairman that decides points of order. 'Tes certain yü can't rise on no points whatever till there's a chairman.

TRUSTAFORD. 'Tes no yüse yüre risin', not the least

bit in the world, till there's some one to zet yü down again. Haw, haw!

Voice from the dumb-as-fishes: "Mr. Trustaford 'e's right."

FREMAN. What I zay is the chairman ought never to 'ave vacated the chair till I'd risen on my point of order. I purpose that he goo and zet down again.

GODLEIGH. Yü can't purpose that to this meetin'; yü can only purpose that to the old meetin' that's not zettin' any longer.

FREMAN. [*Excitedly*] I don' care what old meetin' 'tis that's zettin'. I purpose that Sol Potter goo an' zet in that chair again, while I rise on my point of order.

TRUSTAFORD. [*Scratching his head*] 'Tesn't regular—but I guess yü've got to goo, Sol, or us shan't 'ave no peace.

SOL POTTER, *still wiping his brow, goes back to the chair.*

MORSE. [*Stolidly—to* FREMAN] Zet down, Will Freman. [*He pulls at him with a blacksmith's arm.*

FREMAN. [*Remaining erect with an effort*] I'm not a-goin' to zet down till I've arisen.

JARLAND. Now then, there 'e is in the chair. What's yüre point of order?

FREMAN. [*Darting his eyes here and there, and flinging his hand up to his gipsy-like head*] 'Twas—'twas—Darned ef y' 'aven't putt it clean out o' my 'ead.

JARLAND. We can't wait for yüre points of order. Come out o' that chair, Sol Potter.

SOL POTTER *rises and is about to vacate the chair.*

FREMAN. I know! There ought to 'a been minutes taken. Yü can't 'ave no meetin' without minutes. When us comes to electin' a chairman o' the next meetin', 'e won't 'ave no minutes to read.

SOL POTTER. 'Twas only to putt down that I was elected chairman to elect a meetin' to elect a chairman to preside over a meetin' to pass a resolution dalin' wi' the curate. That's aisy set down, that is.

FREMAN. [*Mollified*] We'll 'ave that zet down, then, while we're electin' the chairman o' the next meetin'.

[*A silence.*

TRUSTAFORD. Well then, seein' this is the praaper old meetin' for carryin' the resolution about the curate, I purpose Mr. Sol Potter take the chair.

FREMAN. I purpose Mr. Trustaford. I 'aven't a-got nothin' against Sol Potter, but seein' that he elected the meetin' that's to elect 'im, it might be said that 'e was electin' of himzelf in a manner of spakin'. Us don't want that said.

MORSE. [*Amid meditative grunts from the dumb-as-fishes*] There's some-at in that. One o' they tü purposals must be putt to the meetin'.

FREMAN. Second must be putt virst, fur züre.

TRUSTAFORD. I dunno as I wants to zet in that chair. To hiss the curate, 'tis a ticklish sort of a job after that. Vurst comes afore second, Will Freeman.

FREMAN. Second is amendment to virst. 'Tes the amendments is putt virst.

TRUSTAFORD. 'Ow's that, Mr. Godleigh? I'm not particular eggzac'ly to a dilly zort of a point like that.

SOL POTTER. [*Scratching his head*] 'Tes a very nice point, for züre.

GODLEIGH. 'Tes undoubtedly for the chairman to decide.

Voice from the dumb-as-fishes: "But there ain't no chairman yet."

JARLAND. Sol Potter's chairman.

FREMAN. No, 'e ain't.

MORSE. Yes, 'e is—'e's chairman till this second old meetin' gets on the go.

FREMAN. I deny that. What dü yü say, Mr. Trustaford?

TRUSTAFORD. I can't 'ardly tell. It dü zeem a darned long-sufferin' sort of a business altogether.

[*A silence.*

MORSE. [*Slowly*] Tell 'ee what 'tis, us shan't dü no güde like this.

GODLEIGH. 'Tes for Mr. Freman or Mr. Trustaford, one or t'other to withdraw their motions.

TRUSTAFORD. [*After a pause, with cautious generosity*] I've no objections to withdrawin' mine, if Will Freman'll withdraw his'n.

FREMAN. I won't never be be'indhand. If Mr. Trustaford withdraws, I withdraws mine.

MORSE. [*With relief*] That's zensible. Putt the motion to the meetin'.

SOL POTTER. There ain't no motion left to putt.

[*Silence of consternation.*

[*In the confusion* JIM BERE *is seen to stand up.*

GODLEIGH. Jim Bere to spake. Silence for Jim!

VOICES. Aye! Silence for Jim!

SOL POTTER. Well, Jim?

JIM. [*Smiling and slow*] Nothin' düin'.

TRUSTAFORD. Bravo, Jim! Yü'm right. Best zense yet!

[*Applause from the dumb-as-fishes.*

[*With his smile brightening,* JIM *resumes his seat.*

SOL POTTER. [*Wiping his brow*] Dü seem to me, gentlemen, seein' as we'm got into a bit of a tangle in a manner of spakin', 'twid be the most zimplest and vairest way to begin all over vrom the beginnin', so's t'ave it all vair an' square for every one.

In the uproar of "Aye" and "No," it is noticed that TIBBY JARLAND *is standing in front of her father with her finger, for want of something better, in her mouth.*

TIBBY. [*In her stolid voice*] Please, sister Mercy says, curate 'ave got to "Lastly." [JARLAND *picks her up, and there is silence.*] An' please to come quick.

JARLAND. Come on, mates; quietly now!

[*He goes out, and all begin to follow him.*

MORSE. [*Slowest, save for* SOL POTTER] 'Tes rare lucky us was all agreed to hiss the curate afore us began the botherin' old meetin', or us widn' 'ardly 'ave 'ad time to settle what to dü.

SOL POTTER. [*Scratching his head*] Aye, 'tes rare lucky, but I dunno if 'tes altogether reg'lar.

CURTAIN.

SCENE III

The village green before the churchyard and the yew-trees at the gate. Into the pitch dark under the yews, light comes out through the half-open church door. Figures are lurking, or moving stealthily —people waiting and listening to the sound of a voice speaking in the church words that are inaudible. Excited whispering and faint giggles come from the deepest yew-tree shade, made ghostly by the white faces and the frocks of young girls continually flitting up and back in the blackness. A girl's figure comes flying out from the porch, down the path of light, and joins the stealthy group.

WHISPERING VOICE OF MERCY. Where's 'e got to now, Gladys?

WHISPERING VOICE OF GLADYS. 'E've just finished.

VOICE OF CONNIE. Whü pushed t'door open?

VOICE OF GLADYS. Tim Clyst—I giv' it a little push, meself.

VOICE OF CONNIE. Oh!

VOICE OF GLADYS. Tim Clyst's gone in!

ANOTHER VOICE. O-o-o-h!

VOICE OF MERCY. Whü else is there, tü?

VOICE OF GLADYS. Ivy's there, an' old Mrs. Potter, an' tü o' the maids from th'Hall; that's all as ever.

VOICE OF CONNIE. Not the old grey mare?

VOICE OF GLADYS. No. She ain't ther'. 'Twill just be th'ymn now, an' the Blessin'. Tibby gone for 'em?

VOICE OF MERCY. Yes.

VOICE OF CONNIE. Mr. Burlacombe's gone in home, I saw 'im pass by just now—'e don' like it. Father don't like it neither.

VOICE OF MERCY. Mr. Strangway shouln' 'ave taken my skylark, an' thrown father out o' winder. 'Tis goin' to be awful fun! Oh!

She jumps up and down in the darkness. And a voice from far in the shadow says: "Hsssh! Quiet, yü maids!" *The voice has ceased speaking in the church. There is a moment's dead silence. The voice speaks again; then from the wheezy little organ come the first faint chords of a hymn.*

GLADYS. "Nearer, my God, to Thee!"

VOICE OF MERCY. 'Twill be funny, with no one 'ardly singin'.

The sound of the old hymn sung by just six voices comes out to them rather sweet and clear.

GLADYS. [*Softly*] 'Tis pretty, tü. Why! They're only singin' one verse!

A moment's silence, and the voice speaks, uplifted, pronouncing the Blessing: "The peace of God——" *As the last words die away, dark figures from the inn approach over the grass, till quite a crowd seems standing there without a word spoken. Then from out the church porch come the congregation.* TIM CLYST *first, hastily lost among the waiting figures in the dark; old Mrs. Potter, a half-blind old lady groping her way and perceiving nothing out of the ordinary; the two maids from the Hall, self-conscious and scared, scuttling along. Last,* IVY BURLACOMBE *quickly, and starting back at the dim, half-hidden crowd.*

VOICE OF GLADYS. [*Whispering*] Ivy! Here, quick!

IVY *sways, darts off towards the voice, and is lost in the shadow.*

VOICE OF FREMAN. [*Low*] Wait, boys, till I give signal.

Two or three squirks and giggles; TIM CLYST'S *voice:* "Ya-as! Don't 'ee tread on my toe!" *A soft, frightened* "O-o-h!" *from a girl. Some quick, excited whisperings:*

"Lüke!" "Zee there!" "He's comin'!"
And then a perfectly dead silence. The figure of STRANGWAY *is seen in his dark clothes, passing from the vestry to the church porch. He stands plainly visible in the lighted porch, locking the door, then steps forward. Just as he reaches the edge of the porch, a low hiss breaks the silence. It swells very gradually into a long, hissing groan.* STRANGWAY *stands motionless, his hand over his eyes, staring into the darkness. A girl's figure can be seen to break out of the darkness and rush away. When at last the groaning has died into sheer expectancy,* STRANGWAY *drops his hand.*

STRANGWAY. [*In a low voice*] Yes! I'm glad. Is Jarland there?

FREMAN. He's 'ere—no thanks to yü! Hsss!

[*The hiss breaks out again, then dies away.*

JARLAND'S VOICE. [*Threatening*] Try if yü can dü it again.

STRANGWAY. No, Jarland, no! I ask you to forgive me. Humbly!

[*A hesitating silence, broken by muttering.*

CLYST'S VOICE. Bravo!

A VOICE. That's vair!

A VOICE. 'E's afraid o' the sack—that's what 'tis.

A VOICE. [*Groaning*] 'E's a praaper coward.

A VOICE. Whü funked the doctor?

CLYST'S VOICE. Shame on 'ee, therr!

STRANGWAY. You're right—all of you! I'm not fit!

An uneasy and excited muttering and whispering dies away into renewed silence.

STRANGWAY. What I did to Tam Jarland is not the real cause of what you're doing, is it? I understand. But don't be troubled. It's all over. I'm going—you'll get some one better. Forgive me, Jarland. I can't see your face—it's very dark.

FREMAN'S VOICE. [*Mocking*] Wait for the full müne.

GODLEIGH. [*Very low*] "My 'eart 'E lighted not!"

STRANGWAY. [*Starting at the sound of his own words thus mysteriously given him out of the darkness*] Whoever found that, please tear it up! [*After a moment's silence*] Many of you have been very kind to me. You won't see me again— Good-bye, all!

He stands for a second motionless, then moves resolutely down into the darkness so peopled with shadows.

UNCERTAIN VOICES AS HE PASSES. Good-bye, zurr! Good luck, zurr! [*He has gone.*

CLYST'S VOICE. Three cheers for Mr. Strangway!

And a queer, strangled cheer, with groans still threading it, arises.

CURTAIN.

ACT III

SCENE I

In the BURLACOMBES' *hall-sittingroom the curtains are drawn, a lamp burns, and the door stands open.* BURLACOMBE *and his wife are hovering there, listening to the sound of mingled cheers and groaning.*

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Aw! my güdeness—what a thing t'appen! I'd süner 'a lost all me ducks. [*She makes towards the inner door*] I can't never face 'im.

BURLACOMBE. 'E can't expect nothin' else, if 'e act like that.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. 'Tes only düin' as 'e'd be done by.

BURLACOMBE. Aw! Yü can't go on forgivin' 'ere, an' forgivin' there. 'Tesn't nat'ral.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. 'Tes the mischief 'e'm a parson. 'Tes 'im bein' a lamb o' God—or 'twidden be so quare for 'im to be forgivin'.

BURLACOMBE. Yü goo an' make un a güde 'ot drink.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Poor soul! What'll 'e dü now, I wonder? [*Under her breath*] 'E's comin'!

She goes hurriedly. BURLACOMBE, *with a*

startled look back, wavers and makes to follow her, but stops undecided in the inner doorway. STRANGWAY *comes in from the darkness. He turns to the window and drops overcoat and hat and the church key on the window-seat, looking about him as men do when too hard driven, and never fixing his eyes long enough on anything to see it.* BURLACOMBE, *closing the door into the house, advances a step. At the sound* STRANGWAY *faces round.*

BURLACOMBE. I wanted for yü to know, zurr, that me an' mine 'adn't nothin' to dü wi' that darned fülishness, just now.

STRANGWAY. [*With a ghost of a smile*] Thank you, Burlacombe. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter a bit.

BURLACOMBE. I 'ope yü won't take no notice of it. Like a lot o' silly bees they get. [*After an uneasy pause*] Yü'll excuse me spakin' of this mornin', an' what 'appened. 'Tes a brave pity it cam' on yü so sudden-like before yü 'ad time to think. 'Tes a sort o' thing a man shüde zet an' chew upon. Certainly 'tes not a bit o' yüse goin' against human nature. Ef yü don't stand up for yüreself there's no one else not goin' to. 'Tes yüre not 'avin' done that 'as made 'em so rampageous. [*Stealing another look at* STRANGWAY] Yü'll excuse me, zurr, spakin' of it, but 'tes amazin' sad to zee a man let go his own, without a word o' darin'. 'Tes as ef 'e 'ad no passions-like.

STRANGWAY. Look at me, Burlacombe.

BURLACOMBE *looks up, trying hard to keep his eyes on* STRANGWAY'S, *that seem to burn in his thin face.*

STRANGWAY. Do I look like that? Please, please! [*He touches his breast*] I've too much here. Please!

BURLACOMBE. [*With a sort of startled respect*] Well, zurr, 'tes not for me to zay nothin', certainly.

He turns and after a slow look back at STRANGWAY *goes out.*

STRANGWAY. [*To himself*] Passions! No passions! Ha!

The outer door is opened and IVY BURLACOMBE *appears, and, seeing him, stops. Then, coming softly towards him, she speaks timidly.*

IVY. Oh! Mr. Strangway, Mrs. Bradmere's comin' from the Rectory. I ran an' told 'em. Oh! 'twas awful.

STRANGWAY *starts, stares at her, and turning on his heel, goes into the house.* IVY'S *face is all puckered, as if she were on the point of tears. There is a gentle scratching at the door, which has not been quite closed.*

VOICE OF GLADYS. [*Whispering*] Ivy! Come on!

IVY. I won't.

VOICE OF MERCY. Yü must. Us can't dü without yü.

IVY. [*Going to the door*] I don't want to.

VOICE OF GLADYS. "Naughty maid, she won't come out," Ah! dü 'ee!

VOICE OF CONNIE. Tim Clyst an' Bobbie's comin'; us'll only be six anyway. Us can't dance "figure of eight" without yü.

IVY. [*Stamping her foot*] I don't want to dance at all! I don't.

MERCY. Aw! She's temper. Yü can bang on tambourine, then!

GLADYS. [*Running in*] Quick, Ivy! Here's the old grey mare comin' down the green. Quick.

With whispering and scuffling, gurgling and squeaking, the reluctant IVY'S *hand is caught and she is jerked away. In their haste they have left the door open behind them.*

VOICE OF MRS. BRADMERE. [*Outside*] Who's that?

She knocks loudly, and rings a bell; then, without waiting, comes in through the open door.

Noting the overcoat and hat on the window-sill she moves across to ring the bell. But as she does so, MRS. BURLACOMBE, *followed by* BURLACOMBE, *comes in from the house.*

MRS. BRADMERE. This disgraceful business! Where's Mr. Strangway? I see he's in.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. Yes, m'm, he'm in—but—but Burlacombe dü zay he'm terrible upzet.

MRS. BRADMERE. I should think so. I must see him—at once.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. I doubt bed's the best place for 'un, an' a güde 'ot drink. Burlacombe zays he'm like a man standin' on the edge of a cliff, and the laste tipsy o' wind might throw un over.

MRS. BRADMERE. [*To* BURLACOMBE] You've seen him, then?

BURLACOMBE. Yeas; an' I don't like the lüke of un—not a little bit, I don't.

MRS. BURLACOMBE. [*Almost to herself*] Poor soul; 'e've a-'ad tü much to try un this yer long time past. I've a-seen 'tis sperrit comin' thrü 'is body, as yü might zay. He's torn to bits, that's what 'tis.

BURLACOMBE. 'Twas a praaper cowardly thing to hiss a man when he's down. But 'twas natural tü, in a manner of spakin'. But 'tesn't that troublin' 'im. 'Tes in here [*touching his forehead*], along of his wife, to my thinkin'. They zay 'e've a-known about 'er afore she went away. Think of what 'e've 'ad to kape in all this time. 'Tes enough to drive a man silly after that. I've a-locked my gun up. I see a man lüke like that once before—an' sure enough 'e was dead in the mornin'!

MRS. BRADMERE. Nonsense, Burlacombe! [*To* MRS. BURLACOMBE] Go and tell him I want to see him—must see him. [MRS. BURLACOMBE *goes into the house*] And look here, Burlacombe; if we catch any one, man or woman, talking of this outside the village, it'll be the end of their tenancy, whoever they may be. Let them all know that. I'm glad he threw that

drunken fellow out of the window, though it was a little——

BURLACOMBE. Aye! The nüspapers would be praaper glad of that, for a tiddy bit o' nüse.

MRS. BRADMERE. My goodness! Yes! The men are all up at the inn. Go and tell them what I said —*it's not to get about.* Go at once, Burlacombe.

BURLACOMBE. Must be a turrable job for 'im, every one's knowin' about 'is wife like this. He'm a proud man tü, I think. 'Tes a funny business altogether!

MRS. BRADMERE. Horrible! Poor fellow! Now, come! Do your best, Burlacombe!

BURLACOMBE *touches his forelock and goes.* MRS. BRADMERE *stands quite still, thinking. Then going to the photograph, she stares up at it.*

MRS. BRADMERE. You baggage!

STRANGWAY *has come in noiselessly, and is standing just behind her. She turns, and sees him. There is something so still, so startlingly still in his figure and white face, that she cannot for the moment find her voice.*

MRS. BRADMERE. [*At last*] This is most distressing. I'm deeply sorry. [*Then, as he does not answer, she goes a step closer*] I'm an old woman; and old women must take liberties, you know, or they couldn't get on at all. Come now! Let's try and talk it over calmly and see if we can't put things right.

STRANGWAY. You were very good to come; but I would rather not.

MRS. BRADMERE. I know you're in as grievous trouble as a man can be.

STRANGWAY. Yes.

MRS. BRADMERE. [*With a little sound of sympathy*] What are you—thirty-five? I'm sixty-eight if I'm a day—old enough to be your mother. I can feel what you must have been through all these months, I can indeed. But you know you've gone the wrong way to work. We aren't angels down here below! And a son of the Church can't act as if for himself alone. The eyes of every one are on him.

STRANGWAY. [*Taking the church key from the window-sill*] Take this, please.

MRS. BRADMERE. No, no, no! Jarland deserved all he got. You had great provocation——

STRANGWAY. It's not Jarland. [*Holding out the key*] Please take it to the Rector. I beg his forgiveness. [*Touching his breast*] There's too much I can't speak of—can't make plain. Take it to him, please.

MRS. BRADMERE. Mr. Strangway—I don't accept this. I am sure my husband—the Church—will never accept——

STRANGWAY. Take it!

MRS. BRADMERE. [*Almost unconsciously taking it*] Mind! We don't accept it. You must come and talk to the Rector to-morrow. You're overwrought. You'll see it all in another light, then.

STRANGWAY. [*With a strange smile*] Perhaps. [*Lifting the blind*] Beautiful night! Couldn't be more beautiful!

MRS. BRADMERE. [*Startled—softly*] Don't turn away from those who want to help you! I'm a grumpy old woman, but I can feel for you. Don't try and keep it all back, like this! A woman would cry, and it would all seem clearer at once. Now won't you let me——?

STRANGWAY. No one can help, thank you.

MRS. BRADMERE. Come! Things haven't gone beyond mending, really, if you'll face them. [*Pointing to the photograph*] You know what I mean. We dare not foster immorality.

STRANGWAY. [*Quivering as at a jabbed nerve*] Don't speak of that!

MRS. BRADMERE. But think what you've done, Mr. Strangway! If you can't take your wife back, surely you must divorce her. You can never help her to go on like this in secret sin.

STRANGWAY. Torture her—one way or the other?

MRS. BRADMERE. No, no; I want you to do as the Church—as all Christian society would wish. Come! You can't let this go on. My dear man, do your duty at all costs!

STRANGWAY. Break her heart?

MRS. BRADMERE. Then you love that woman—more than God!

STRANGWAY. [*His face quivering*] Love!

MRS. BRADMERE. They told me— Yes, and I can

see you're in a bad way. Come, pull yourself together! You can't defend what you're doing.

STRANGWAY. I do not try.

MRS. BRADMERE. I *must* get you to see! My father was a clergyman; I'm married to one; I've two sons in the Church. I know what I'm talking about. It's a priest's business to guide the people's lives.

STRANGWAY. [*Very low*] But not mine! No more!

MRS. BRADMERE. [*Looking at him shrewdly*] There's something very queer about you to-night. You ought to a see doctor.

STRANGWAY. [*A smile coming and going on his lips*] If I am not better soon——

MRS. BRADMERE. I know it must be terrible to feel that everybody— [*A convulsive shiver passes over* STRANGWAY, *and he shrinks against the door*] But come! Live it down! [*With anger growing at his silence*] Live it down, man! You can't desert your post—and let these villagers do what they like with us? Do you realize that you're letting a woman, who has treated you abominably—yes, abominably —go scot-free, to live comfortably with another man? What an example!

STRANGWAY. Will you, please, not speak of that!

MRS. BRADMERE. I must! This great Church of ours is based on the rightful condemnation of wrongdoing. There are times when forgiveness is a sin, Michael Strangway. You must keep the whip hand. You must fight!

STRANGWAY. Fight! [*Touching his heart*] My fight is *here.* Have *you* ever been in hell? For months and months—burned and longed; hoped against hope; killed a man in thought day by day? Never rested, for love and hate? I—condemn! I—judge! No! It's rest I have to find—somewhere—somehow—rest! And how—how can I find rest?

MRS. BRADMERE. [*Who has listened to his outburst in a sort of coma*] You are a strange man! One of these days you'll go off your head if you don't take care.

STRANGWAY. [*Smiling*] One of these days the flowers will grow out of me; and I shall sleep.

MRS. BRADMERE stares at his smiling face a long moment in silence, then with a little sound, half sniff, half snort, she goes to the door. There she halts.

MRS. BRADMERE. And you mean to let all this go on— Your wife——

STRANGWAY. Go! Please go!

MRS. BRADMERE. Men like you have been buried at cross-roads before now! Take care! God punishes!

STRANGWAY. Is there a God?

MRS. BRADMERE. Ah! [*With finality*] You must see a doctor.

Seeing that the look on his face does not change, she opens the door, and hurries away into the moonlight.

STRANGWAY *crosses the room to where his wife's*

picture hangs, and stands before it, his hands grasping the frame. Then he takes it from the wall, and lays it face upwards on the window-seat.

STRANGWAY. [*To himself*] Gone! What is there, now?

The sound of an owl's hooting is floating in, and of voices from the green outside the inn.

STRANGWAY. [*To himself*] Gone! Taken faith—hope—life!

JIM BERE *comes wandering into the open doorway.*

JIM BERE. Güde avenin', zurr.

At his slow gait, with his feeble smile, he comes in, and standing by the window-seat beside the long dark coat that still lies there, he looks down at STRANGWAY *with his lost eyes.*

JIM. Yü threw un out of winder. I cud 'ave, once, I cud. [STRANGWAY *neither moves nor speaks; and* JIM BERE *goes on with his unimaginably slow speech*] They'm laughin' at yü, zurr. An' so I come to tell 'ee how to dü. 'Twas full müne—when I caught 'em, him an' my girl. I caught 'em. [*With a strange and awful flash of fire*] I did; an' I tuk un [*He takes up* STRANGWAY'S *coat and grips it with his trembling hands, as a man grips another's neck*] like that—I tuk un.

As the coat falls, like a body out of which the breath has been squeezed, STRANGWAY, *rising, catches it.*

STRANGWAY. [*Gripping the coat*] And he fell!

He lets the coat fall on the floor, and puts his foot on it. Then, staggering back, he leans against the window.

JIM. Yü see, I loved 'er—I did. [*The lost look comes back to his eyes*] Then somethin'—I dunno—and—and— [*He lifts his hand and passes it up and down his side*] 'Twas like this for ever.

[*They gaze at each other in silence.*

JIM. [*At last*] I come to tell yü. They'm all laughin' at yü. But yü'm strong—yü go over to Durford to that doctor man, an' take un like I did. [*He tries again to make the sign of squeezing a man's neck*] They can't laugh at yü no more, then. Tha's what I come to tell yü. Tha's the way for a Christian man to dü. Güde naight, zurr. I come to tell yee.

STRANGWAY *motions to him in silence. And, very slowly,* JIM BERE *passes out.*

The voices of men coming down the green are heard.

VOICES. Güde naight, Tam. Güde naight, old Jim!

VOICES. Güde naight, Mr. Trustaford. 'Tes a wonderful fine müne.

VOICE OF TRUSTAFORD. Ah! 'Tes a brave müne for th' poor old curate!

VOICE. "My 'eart 'E lighted not!"

TRUSTAFORD'S *laugh, and the rattling, fainter and fainter, of wheels. A spasm seizes on* STRANGWAY'S *face, as he stands there by the open door, his hand grips his throat; he looks from side to side, as if seeking a way of escape.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE II

The BURLACOMBES' *high and nearly empty barn. A lantern is hung by a rope that lifts the bales of straw, to a long ladder leaning against a rafter. This gives all the light there is, save for a slender track of moonlight, slanting in from the end, where the two great doors are not quite closed. On a rude bench in front of a few remaining, stacked, square-cut bundles of last year's hay, sits* TIBBY JARLAND, *a bit of apple in her mouth, sleepily beating on a tambourine. With stockinged feet* GLADYS, IVY, CONNIE, *and* MERCY, TIM CLYST, *and* BOBBIE

JARLAND, *a boy of fifteen, are dancing a truncated "Figure of Eight"; and their shadows are dancing alongside on the walls. Shoes and some apples have been thrown down close to the side door through which they have come in. Now and then* IVY, *the smallest and best of the dancers, ejaculates words of direction, and one of the youths grunts or breathes loudly out of the confusion of his mind. Save for this and the dumb beat and jingle of the sleepy tambourine, there is no sound. The dance comes to its end, but the drowsy* TIBBY *goes on beating.*

MERCY. That'll dü, Tibby; we're finished. Ate yüre apple. [*The stolid* TIBBY *eats her apple.*

CLYST. [*In his teasing, excitable voice*] Yü maids don't dance 'alf's well as us dü. Bobbie 'e's a great dancer. 'E dance vine. I'm a güde dancer, meself.

GLADYS. A'n't yü conceited just?

CLYST. Aw! Ah! Yü'll give me kiss for that. [*He chases, but cannot catch that slippery white figure*] Can't she glimmer!

MERCY. Gladys! Up ladder!

CLYST. Yü go up ladder; I'll catch 'ee then. Naw, yü maids, don't yü give her succour. That's not vair.

[*Catching hold of* MERCY, *who gives a little squeal.*

CONNIE. Mercy, don't! Mrs. Burlacombe'll hear. Ivy, go an' peek.

[IVY *goes to the side door and peers through.*

CLYST. [*Abandoning the chase and picking up an apple—they all have the joyous irresponsibility that*

attends forbidden doings] Ya-as, this is a güde apple. Lüke at Tibby!

TIBBY, *overcome by drowsiness, has fallen back into the hay, asleep.* GLADYS, *leaning against the hay breaks into humming:*

"There cam' three dükes a-ridin', a-ridin', a-ridin',
There cam' three dükes a ridin'
With a ransy-tansy tay!"

CLYST. Us 'as got on vine; us'll get prize for our dancin'.

CONNIE. There won't be no prize if Mr. Strangway goes away. 'Tes funny 'twas Mrs. Strangway started us.

IVY. [*From the door*] 'Twas wicked to hiss him.

[*A moment's hush.*

CLYST. 'Twasn't I.

BOBBIE. I never did.

GLADYS. Oh! Bobbie, yü did! Yü blew in my ear.

CLYST. 'Twas the praaper old wind in the trees. Did make a brave noise, zurely.

MERCY. 'E shuld'n' 'a let my skylark go.

CLYST. [*Out of sheer contradictoriness*] Ya-as, 'e shüde, then. What dü yü want with th' birds of the air? They'm no güde to yü.

IVY. [*Mournfully*] And now he's goin' away.

CLYST. Ya-as; 'tes a pity. He's the best man I ever seen since I was comin' from my mother. He's a güde man. He'm got a zad face, sure enough, though.

IVY. Güde folk always 'ave zad faces.

CLYST. I knü a güde man—'e sold pigs—very güde man: 'e 'ad a büdiful bright vace like the müne. [*Touching his stomach*] I was sad, meself, once. 'Twas a funny scrabblin'-like feelin'.

GLADYS. If 'e go away, whü's goin' to finish us for confirmation?

CONNIE. The Rector and the old grey mare.

MERCY. I don' want no more finishin'; I'm confirmed enough.

CLYST. Ya-as; yü'm a büty.

GLADYS. Suppose we all went an' asked 'im not to go?

IVY. 'Twouldn't be no güde.

CONNIE. Where's 'e goin'?

MERCY. He'll go to London, of course.

IVY. He's so gentle; I think 'e'll go to an island, where there's nothin' but birds and beasts and flowers.

CLYST. Aye! He'm awful fond o' the dumb things.

IVY. They're kind and peaceful; that's why.

CLYST. Aw! Yü see tü praaper old tom cats; they'm not tü peaceful, after that, nor kind naighther.

BOBBIE. [*Surprisingly*] If 'e's sad, per'aps 'e'll go to 'Eaven.

IVY. Oh! not yet, Bobbie. He's tü young.

CLYST. [*Following his own thoughts*] Ya-as. 'Tes a funny place, tü, nowadays, judgin' from the papers.

GLADYS. Wonder if there's dancin' in 'Eaven?

IVY. There's beasts, and flowers, and waters, and trees—'e told us.

CLYST. Naw! There's no dumb things in 'Eaven. Jim Bere 'e says there is! 'E thinks 'is old cat's there.

IVY. Yes. [*Dreamily*] There's stars, an' owls, an' a man playin' on the flute. Where 'tes güde, there must be müsic.

CLYST. Old brass band, shuldn' wonder, like th' Salvation Army.

IVY. [*Putting up her hands to an imaginary pipe*] No; 'tis a boy that goes so; an' all the dumb things an' all the people goo after 'im—like this.

She marches slowly, playing her imaginary pipe, and one by one they all fall in behind her, padding round the barn in their stockinged feet. Passing the big doors, IVY *throws them open.*

An' 'tes all like that in 'Eaven.

She stands there gazing out, still playing on her imaginary pipe. And they all stand a moment silent, staring into the moonlight.

CLYST. 'Tes a glory-be full müne to-night!

IVY. A goldie-cup—a big one. An' millions o' little goldie-cups on the floor of 'Eaven.

MERCY. Oh! Bother 'Eaven! Let's dance "Clapperclaws"! Wake up, Tibby!

GLADYS. Clapperclaws, clapperclaws! Come on, Bobbie—make circle!

CLYST. Clapperclaws! I dance that one fine.

IVY. [*Taking the tambourine*] See, Tibby; like this.

She hums and beats gently, then restores the tambourine to the sleepy TIBBY, *who, waking, has placed a piece of apple in her mouth.*

CONNIE. 'Tes awful difficult, this one.

IVY. [*Illustrating*] No; yü just jump, an' clap yüre 'ands. Lovely, lovely!

CLYST. Like ringin' bells! Come ahn!

TIBBY *begins her drowsy beating,* IVY *hums the tune; they dance, and their shadows dance again upon the walls. When she has beaten but a few moments on the tambourine,* TIBBY *is overcome once more by sleep and falls back again into her nest of hay, with her little shoed feet just visible over the edge of the bench.* IVY *catches up the tambourine, and to her beating and humming the dancers dance on.*

Suddenly GLADYS *stops like a wild animal surprised, and cranes her neck towards the side door.*

CONNIE. [*Whispering*] What is it?

GLADYS. [*Whispering*] I hear—some one—comin' across the yard.

She leads a noiseless scamper towards the shoes. BOBBIE JARLAND *shins up the ladder and seizes the lantern.* IVY *drops the tambourine. They all fly to the big doors, and vanish into*

the moonlight, pulling the doors nearly to again after them.

There is the sound of scrabbling at the latch of the side door, and STRANGWAY *comes into the nearly dark barn. Out in the night the owl is still hooting. He closes the door, and that sound is lost. Like a man walking in his sleep, he goes up to the ladder, takes the rope in his hand, and makes a noose. He can be heard breathing, and in the darkness the motions of his hands are dimly seen, freeing his throat and putting the noose round his neck. He stands swaying to and fro at the foot of the ladder; then, with a sigh, sets his foot on it to mount. One of the big doors creaks and opens in the wind, letting in a broad path of moonlight.*

STRANGWAY *stops; freeing his neck from the noose, he walks quickly up the track of moonlight, whitened from head to foot, to close the doors.*

The sound of his boots on the bare floor has awakened TIBBY JARLAND. *Struggling out of her hay nest she stands staring at his whitened figure, and bursts suddenly into a wail.*

TIBBY. O-oh! Mercy! Where are yü? I'm frightened! I'm frightened! O-oooo!

STRANGWAY. [*Turning—startled*] Who's that? Who is it?

TIBBY. O-oh! A ghosty! Oo-ooo!

STRANGWAY. [*Going to her quickly*] It's me, Tibby —Tib—only me!

TIBBY. I see'd a ghosty.

STRANGWAY. [*Taking her up*] No, no, my bird, you didn't! It was me.

TIBBY. [*Burying her face against him*] I'm frighted. It was a big one. [*She gives tongue again*] O-o-oh!

STRANGWAY. There, there! It's nothing but me. Look!

TIBBY. No. [*She peeps out all the same.*

STRANGWAY. See! It's the moonlight made me all white. See! You're a brave girl now?

TIBBY. [*Cautiously*] I want my apple.

She points towards her nest. STRANGWAY *carries her there, picks up an apple, and gives it her.* TIBBY *takes a bite.*

TIBBY. I want my tambouline.

STRANGWAY. [*Giving her the tambourine, and carrying her back into the track of moonlight*] Now we're both ghosties! Isn't it funny?

TIBBY. [*Doubtfully*] Yes.

STRANGWAY. See! The moon's laughing at us! See? Laugh then!

TIBBY, *tambourine in one hand and apple in the other, smiles stolidly. He sets her down on the ladder, and stands, holding her level with him.*

TIBBY. [*Solemnly*] I'se still frightened.

STRANGWAY. No! Full moon, Tibby! Shall we wish for it?

TIBBY. Full müne.

STRANGWAY. Moon! We're wishing for you. Moon, moon!

TIBBY. Müne, we're wishin' for yü!

STRANGWAY. What do you wish it to be?

TIBBY. Bright new shillin'!

STRANGWAY. A face.

TIBBY. Shillin', a shillin'!

STRANGWAY. [*Taking out a shilling and spinning it so that it falls into her pinafore*] See! *Your* wish comes true.

TIBBY. Oh! [*Putting the shilling in her mouth*] Müne's still there!

STRANGWAY. Wish for *me*, Tibby!

TIBBY. Müne, I'm wishin' for yü!

STRANGWAY. Not yet!

TIBBY. Shall I shake my tambouline?

STRANGWAY. Yes, shake your tambouline.

TIBBY. [*Shaking her tambourine*] Müne, I'm shakin' at yü.

STRANGWAY *lays his hand suddenly on the rope, and swings it up on to the beam.*

TIBBY. What d'yü dü that for?

STRANGWAY. To put it out of reach. It's better——

TIBBY. Why is it better? [*She stares up at him.*

STRANGWAY. Come along, Tibby! [*He carries her to*

the big doors, and sets her down] See! All asleep! The birds, and the fields, and the moon!

TIBBY. Müne, müne, we're wishing for yü!

STRANGWAY. Send her your love, and say good-night.

TIBBY. [*Blowing a kiss*] Good-night, müne!

From the barn roof a little white dove's feather comes floating down in the wind. TIBBY *follows it with her hand, catches it, and holds it up to him.*

TIBBY. [*Chuckling*] Lüke. The müne's sent a bit o' love!

STRANGWAY. [*Taking the feather*] Thank you, Tibby! I want that bit o' love. [*Very faint, comes the sound of music*] Listen!

TIBBY. It's Miss Willis, playin' on the pianny!

STRANGWAY. No; it's Love; walking and talking in the world.

TIBBY. [*Dubiously*] Is it?

STRANGWAY. [*Pointing*] See! Everything coming out to listen! See them, Tibby! All the little things with pointed ears, children, and birds, and flowers, and bunnies; and the bright rocks, and—men! Hear their hearts beating! And the wind listening!

TIBBY. I can't hear—nor I can't see!

STRANGWAY. Beyond— [*To himself*] They are—they must be; I swear they are! [*Then, catching sight of* TIBBY's *amazed eyes*] And now say good-bye to me.

TIBBY. Where yü goin'?

STRANGWAY. I don't know, Tibby.

VOICE OF MERCY. [*Distant and cautious*] Tibby! Tibby! Where are yü?

STRANGWAY. Mercy calling; run to her!

TIBBY *starts off, turns back and lifts her face. He bends to kiss her, and flinging her arms round his neck, she gives him a good hug. Then, knuckling the sleep out of her eyes, she runs.*

STRANGWAY *stands, uncertain. There is a sound of heavy footsteps; a man clears his throat, close by.*

STRANGWAY. Who's that?

CREMER. Jack Cremer. [*The big man's figure appears out of the shadow of the barn*] That yü, zurr?

STRANGWAY. Yes, Jack. How goes it?

CREMER. 'Tes empty, zurr. But I'll get on some'ow.

STRANGWAY. You put me to shame.

CREMER. No, zurr. I'd be killin' meself, if I didn' feel I must stick it, like yü zaid.

They stand gazing at each other in the moonlight.

STRANGWAY. [*Very low*] I honour you.

CREMER. What's that? [*Then, as* STRANGWAY *does not answer*] I'll just be walkin'—I won' be goin' 'ome to-night. 'Tes the full müne—lucky.

STRANGWAY. [*Suddenly*] Wait for me at the cross-

roads, Jack. I'll come with you. Will you have me, brother?

CREMER. Sure!

STRANGWAY. Wait, then.

CREMER. Aye, zurr.

With his heavy tread CREMER *passes on. And* STRANGWAY *leans against the lintel of the door, looking at the moon, that, quite full and golden, hangs not far above the straight horizon, where the trees stand small, in a row.*

STRANGWAY. [*Lifting his hand in the gesture of prayer*] God, of the moon and the sun; of joy and beauty, of loneliness and sorrow—give me strength to go on, till I love every living thing!

He moves away, following JACK CREMER. *The full moon shines; the owl hoots; and some one is shaking* TIBBY'S *tambourine.*

THE END

THE FOUNDATIONS

(AN EXTRAVAGANT PLAY)

CAST OF THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

Royalty Theatre, June, 1917

Lord William Dromondy, M.P.	Mr. Dawson Milward
Poulder (*his butler*)	Mr. Sidney Paxton
James (*first footman*)	Mr. Stephen T. Ewart
Henry (*second footman*)	Mr. Allan Jeayes
Thomas (*third footman*)	Mr. William Lawrence
Charles (*fourth footman*)	Mr. Robert Lawlor
The Press	Mr. Lawrence Hanray
Lemmy (*a plumber*)	Mr. Dennis Eadie
Lady William Dromondy	Miss Lydia Bilbrooke
Miss Stokes	Miss Gertrude Sterroll
Old Mrs. Lemmy	Miss Esme Hubbard
Little Anne	Miss Babs Farren
Little Aida	Miss Dinka Starace

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

Lord William Dromondy, M.P.
Lady William Dromondy
Little Anne
Miss Stokes
Mr. Poulder
James
Henry
Thomas
Charles
The Press
Lemmy
Old Mrs. Lemmy
Little Aida
The Duke of Exeter

Some Anti-Sweaters; Some Sweated Workers; and a Crowd

SCENES

SCENE I. *The cellar at* LORD WILLIAM DROMONDY'S *in Park Lane.*

SCENE II. *The room of old* MRS. LEMMY *in Bethnal Green.*

SCENE III. *Ante-room of the hall at* LORD WILLIAM DROMONDY'S.

The Action passes continuously between 8 *and* 10.30 *of a summer evening, some years after the Great War.*

ACT I

LORD WILLIAM DROMONDY'S *mansion in Park Lane. Eight o'clock of the evening.* LITTLE ANNE DROMONDY *and the large footman,* JAMES, *gaunt and grim, discovered in the wine cellar, by light of gas.* JAMES, *in plush breeches, is selecting wine.*

L. ANNE. James, are you really James?

JAMES. No, my proper name's John.

L. ANNE. Oh! [*A pause*] And is Charles's an improper name too?

JAMES. His proper name's Mark.

L. ANNE. Then is Thomas Matthew?

JAMES. Miss Anne, stand clear o' that bin. You'll put your foot through one o' those 'ock bottles.

L. ANNE. No, but James—Henry might be Luke, really?

JAMES. Now shut it, Miss Anne!

L. ANNE. Who gave you those names? Not your godfathers and godmothers?

JAMES. Poulder. Butlers think they're the Almighty. [*Gloomily*] But his name's Bartholomew.

L. ANNE. Bartholomew Poulder? It's rather jolly.

JAMES. It's hidjeous.

L. ANNE. Which do you like to be called—John or James?

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JAMES. I don't give a darn.

L. ANNE. What is a darn?

JAMES. 'Tain't in the dictionary.

L. ANNE. Do you like my name? Anne Dromondy? It's old, you know. But it's funny, isn't it?

JAMES. [*Indifferently*] It'll pass.

L. ANNE. How many bottles have you got to pick out?

JAMES. Thirty-four.

L. ANNE. Are they all for the dinner, or for the people who come in to the Anti-Sweating Meeting afterwards?

JAMES. All for the dinner. They give the Sweated —tea.

L. ANNE. All for the dinner? They'll drink too much, won't they?

JAMES. We've got to be on the safe side.

L. ANNE. Will it be safer if they drink too much?

JAMES *pauses in the act of dusting a bottle to look at her, as if suspecting irony.*

[*Sniffing*] Isn't the smell delicious here—like the taste of cherries when they've gone bad—[*She sniffs again*] and mushrooms; and boot blacking——

JAMES. That's the escape of gas.

L. ANNE. Has the plumber's man been?

JAMES. Yes.

L. ANNE. Which one?

JAMES. Little blighter I've never seen before.

L. ANNE. What is a little blighter? Can *I* see?

JAMES. He's just gone.

L. ANNE. [*Straying*] Oh! . . . James, are these really the foundations?

JAMES. You might 'arf say so. There's a lot under a woppin' big house like this; you can't hardly get to the bottom of it.

L. ANNE. Everything's built on something, isn't it? And what's *that* built on?

JAMES. Ask another.

L. ANNE. If you wanted to blow it up, though, you'd have to begin from here, wouldn't you?

JAMES. Who'd want to blow it up?

L. ANNE. It *would* make a mess in Park Lane.

JAMES. I've seen a lot bigger messes than this'd make, out in the war.

L. ANNE. Oh! but that's years ago! Was it like this in the trenches, James?

JAMES. [*Grimly*] Ah! 'Cept that you couldn't lay your 'and on a bottle o' port when you wanted one.

L. ANNE. Do you, when you want it, here?

JAMES. [*On guard*] I only suggest it's possible.

L. ANNE. Perhaps Poulder does.

JAMES. [*Icily*] I say nothin' about that.

L. ANNE. Oh! *Do* say something!

JAMES. I'm ashamed of you, Miss Anne, pumpin' me!

L. ANNE. [*Reproachfully*] I'm not pumpin'! I only want to make Poulder jump when I ask him.

JAMES. [*Grinning*] Try it on your own responsibility, then; don't bring me in!

L. ANNE. [*Switching off*] James, do you think there's going to be a bloody revolution?

JAMES. [*Shocked*] I shouldn't use that word, at your age.

L. ANNE. Why not? Daddy used it this morning to Mother. [*Imitating*] "The country's in an awful state, darling; there's going to be a bloody revolution, and we shall all be blown sky-high." Do you like Daddy?

JAMES. [*Taken aback*] Like Lord William? What do you think? We chaps would ha' done anything for him out there in the war.

L. ANNE. He never says that—he always says he'd have done anything for you!

JAMES. Well—that's the same thing.

L. ANNE. It isn't—it's the opposite. What is class hatred, James?

JAMES. [*Wisely*] Ah! A lot o' people thought when the war was over there'd be no more o' that. [*He sniggers*] Used to amuse me to read in the papers about the wonderful unity that was comin'. I could ha' told 'em different.

L. ANNE. Why should people hate? *I* like everybody.

JAMES. You know such a lot o' people, don't you?

L. ANNE. Well, Daddy likes everybody, and Mother likes everybody, except the people who don't like Daddy. I bar Miss Stokes, of course; but then, who wouldn't?

JAMES. [*With a touch of philosophy*] That's right—we all bars them that tries to get something out of us.

L. ANNE. Who do *you* bar, James?

JAMES. Well—[*Enjoying the luxury of thought*]—Speaking generally, I bar everybody that looks down their noses at me. Out there in the trenches, there'd come a shell, and orf'd go some orficer's head, an' I'd think: That might ha' been me—we're all equal in the sight o' the stars. But when I got home again among the torfs, I says to meself: Out there, ye know, *you* filled a hole as well as me; but here you've put it on again, with mufti.

L. ANNE. James, are your breeches made of mufti?

JAMES. [*Contemplating his legs with a certain contempt*] Ah! Footmen were to ha' been off; but Lord William was scared we wouldn't get jobs in the rush. We're on his conscience, and it's on *my* conscience that I've been on his long enough—so, now I've saved a bit, I'm goin' to take meself orf it.

L. ANNE. Oh! Are you going? Where?

JAMES. [*Assembling the last bottles*] Out o' Blighty!

L. ANNE. Is a little blighter a little Englishman?

JAMES. [*Embarrassed*] Well—'e can be.

L. ANNE. [*Musing*] James—we're quite safe down here, aren't we, in a revolution? Only, we wouldn't have fun. Which would you rather—be safe, or have fun?

JAMES. [*Grimly*] Well, I had my bit o' fun in the war.

L. ANNE. *I* like fun that happens when you're not looking.

JAMES. Do you? You'd ha' been just suited.

L. ANNE. James, is there a future life? Miss Stokes says so.

JAMES. It's a belief, in the middle classes.

L. ANNE. What are the middle classes?

JAMES. Anything from two 'undred a year to super-tax.

L. ANNE. Mother says they're terrible. Is Miss Stokes middle class?

JAMES. Yes.

L. ANNE. Then I expect they *are* terrible. She's awfully virtuous, though, isn't she?

JAMES. 'Tisn't so much the bein' virtuous, as the lookin' it, that's awful.

L. ANNE. Are all the middle classes virtuous? Is Poulder?

JAMES. [*Dubiously*] Well. . . . Ask him!

L. ANNE. Yes, I will. Look!

From an empty bin on the ground level she picks up a lighted taper, burnt almost to the end.

JAMES. [*Contemplating it*] Careless!

L. ANNE. Oh! And look! [*She points to a rounded metal object lying in the bin, close to where the taper was*] It's a bomb!

She is about to pick it up when JAMES *takes her by the waist and puts her aside.*

JAMES. [*Sternly*] You stand back there! I don't like the look o' that!

L. ANNE. [*With intense interest*] Is it really a bomb? What fun!

JAMES. Go and fetch Poulder while I keep an eye on it.

L. ANNE. [*On tiptoe of excitement*] If only I can make him jump! Oh, James! we needn't put the light out, need we?

JAMES. No. Clear off and get him, and don't you come back.

L. ANNE. Oh! but I must! I found it!

JAMES. Cut along.

L. ANNE. Shall we bring a bucket?

JAMES. Yes. [ANNE *flies off.* [*Gazing at the object*] Near go! Thought I'd seen enough o' them to last my time. That little gas blighter! He looked a rum 'un, too—one o' these 'ere Bolshies.

In the presence of this grim object the habits of the past are too much for him. He sits on the ground, leaning against one of the bottle baskets, keeping his eyes on the bomb, his large, lean, gorgeous body spread, one elbow on his plush knee. Taking out an empty pipe, he places it mechanically, bowl down, between his lips. There enter, behind him, as from a communication trench, POULDER, *in swallow-tails, with* LITTLE ANNE *behind him.*

L. ANNE. [*Peering round him—ecstatic*] Hurrah! Not gone off yet! It can't—can it—while James is sitting on it?

POULDER. [*Very broad and stout, with square shoulders, a large ruddy face, and a small mouth*] No noise, Miss. James!

JAMES. Hallo!

POULDER. What's all this?

JAMES. Bomb!

POULDER. Miss Anne, off you go, and don't you——

L. ANNE. Come back again! I know! [*She flies.*

JAMES. [*Extending his hand with the pipe in it*] See!

POULDER. [*Severely*] You've been at it again! Look here, you're not in the trenches now. Get up! What are your breeches goin' to be like? You might break a bottle any moment!

JAMES. [*Rising with a jerk to a sort of "Attention!"*] Look here, you starched antiquity, you and I and that bomb are here in the sight of the stars. If you don't look out I'll stamp on it and blow us all to glory! Drop your civilian swank!

POULDER. [*Seeing red*] Ho! Because you had the privilege of fightin' for your country, you still think you can put it on, do you? Take up your wine! 'Pon my word, you fellers have got no nerve left!

JAMES *makes a sudden swoop, lifts the bomb and poises it in both hands.* POULDER *recoils against a bin and gazes at the object.*

JAMES. Put up your hands!

POULDER. I defy you to make me ridiculous.

JAMES. [*Fiercely*] Up with 'em!

POULDER'S *hands go up in an uncontrollable spasm, which he subdues almost instantly, pulling them down again.*

JAMES. Very good. [*He lowers the bomb.*

POULDER. [*Surprised*] *I* never lifted 'em.

JAMES. You'd have made a first-class Boche,

Poulder. Take the bomb yourself; you're in charge of this section.

POULDER. [*Pouting*] It's no part of my duty to carry menial objects; if you're afraid of it I'll send 'Enry.

JAMES. Afraid! You 'Op o' me thumb!

From the "communication trench" appears LITTLE ANNE, *followed by a thin, sharp, sallow-faced man of thirty-five or so, and another* FOOTMAN, *carrying a wine-cooler.*

L. ANNE. I've brought the bucket, and the Press.

PRESS. [*In front of* POULDER'S *round eyes and mouth*] Ah, major domo, I was just taking the names of the Anti-Sweating dinner. [*He catches sight of the bomb in* JAMES'S *hand*] By George! What A.1. irony! [*He brings out a note-book and writes*] "Highest class dining to relieve distress of lowest class—bombed by same!" Tipping! [*He rubs his hands*].

POULDER. [*Drawing himself up*] Sir? *This* is present! [*He indicates* ANNE *with the flat of his hand.*]

L. ANNE. I found the bomb.

PRESS. [*Absorbed*] By Jove! This *is* a piece of luck! [*He writes.*

POULDER. [*Observing him*] This won't do—it won't do at all!

PRESS. [*Writing—absorbed*] "Beginning of the British Revolution!"

POULDER. [*To* JAMES] Put it in the cooler. 'Enry, 'old up the cooler. Gently! Miss Anne, get be'ind the Press.

JAMES. [*Grimly—holding the bomb above the cooler*] It

won't be the Press that'll stop Miss Anne goin' to 'Eaven if one o' this sort goes off. Look out! I'm goin' to drop it.

ALL *recoil.* HENRY *puts the cooler down and backs away.*

L. ANNE. [*Dancing forward*] Oh! Let me see! I missed all the war, you know!

JAMES *lowers the bomb into the cooler.*

POULDER. [*Regaining courage—to* THE PRESS, *who is scribbling in his note-book*] If you mention this before the police lay their hands on it, it'll be contempt o' Court.

PRESS. [*Struck*] I say, major domo, don't call in the police! That's the last resort. Let me do the Sherlocking for you. Who's been down here?

L. ANNE. The plumber's man about the gas—a little blighter we'd never seen before.

JAMES. Lives close by, in Royal Court Mews—No. 3. I had a word with him before he came down. Lemmy his name is.

PRESS. "Lemmy!" [*Noting the address*] Right-o!

L. ANNE. Oh! Do let me come with you!

POULDER. [*Barring the way*] I've got to lay it all before Lord William.

PRESS. Ah! What's he like?

POULDER. [*With dignity*] A gentleman, sir.

PRESS. Then he won't want the police in.

POULDER. *Nor* the Press, if I may go so far as to say so.

PRESS. One to you! But I defy you to keep this

from the Press, major domo. This is the most significant thing that has happened in our time. Guy Fawkes is nothing to it. The foundations of Society reeling! By George, it's a second Bethlehem!

[*He writes.*

POULDER. [*To* JAMES] Take up your wine and follow me. 'Enry, bring the cooler. Miss Anne, precede us. [*To* THE PRESS] You defy me? Very well; I'm goin' to lock you up here.

PRESS. [*Uneasy*] I say—this is medieval.

[*He attempts to pass.*

POULDER. [*Barring the way*] Not so! James, put him up in that empty 'ock bin. We can't have dinner disturbed in any way.

JAMES. [*Putting his hands on* THE PRESS'S *shoulders*] Look here—go quiet! I've had a grudge against you yellow newspaper boys ever since the war—frothin' up your daily hate, an' makin' the Huns desperate. You nearly took my life five hundred times out there. If you squeal, I'm goin' to take yours once—and that'll be enough.

PRESS. That's awfully unjust. I'm not yellow!

JAMES. Well, you look it. Hup.

PRESS. Little Lady Anne, haven't you any authority with these fellows?

L. ANNE. [*Resisting* POULDER'S *pressure*] I won't go! I simply *must* see James put him up!

PRESS. Now, I warn you all plainly—there'll be a leader on this.

[*He tries to bolt, but is seized by* JAMES.

JAMES. [*Ironically*] Ho!

PRESS. My paper has the biggest influence——

JAMES. That's the one! Git up in that 'ock bin, and mind your feet among the claret.

PRESS. This is an outrage on the Press.

JAMES. Then it'll wipe out one by the Press on the Public—an' leave just a million over! Hup!

POULDER. 'Enry, give 'im an 'and.

THE PRESS *mounts, assisted by* JAMES *and* HENRY.

L. ANNE. [*Ecstatic*] It's lovely!

POULDER. [*Nervously*] Mind the '87! Mind!

JAMES. Mind your feet in Mr. Poulder's favourite wine!

A WOMAN'S *voice is heard, as from the depths of a cave, calling "Anne! Anne!"*

L. ANNE. [*Aghast*] Miss Stokes—I must hide!

She gets behind POULDER. *The three Servants achieve dignified positions in front of the bins. The voice comes nearer.* THE PRESS *sits dangling his feet, grinning.* MISS STOKES *appears. She is a woman of forty-five and terribly good manners. Her greyish hair is rolled back off her forehead. She is in a high evening dress, and in the dim light radiates a startled composure.*

MISS S. Poulder, where is Miss Anne?

[ANNE *lays hold of the backs of his legs.*

POULDER. [*Wincing*] I am not in a position to inform you, Miss.

MISS S. They told me she was down here. And what is all this about a bomb?

POULDER. [*Lifting his hand in a calming manner*] The crisis is past; we have it in ice, Miss. 'Enry, show Miss Stokes! [HENRY *indicates the cooler.*

MISS S. Good gracious! Does Lord William know?

POULDER. Not at present, Miss.

MISS S. But he ought to, at once.

POULDER. We 'ave 'ad complications.

MISS S. [*Catching sight of the legs of* THE PRESS] Dear me! What *are* those?

JAMES. [*Gloomily*] The complications.

MISS STOKES *puts up her glasses and stares at them.*

PRESS. [*Cheerfully*] Miss Stokes, would you kindly tell Lord William I'm here from the Press, and would like to speak to him?

MISS S. But—er—why are you up there?

JAMES. 'E got up out o' remorse, Miss.

MISS S. What *do* you mean, James?

PRESS. [*Warmly*] Miss Stokes, I appeal to you. Is it fair to attribute responsibility to an unsigned journalist for what he has to say?

JAMES. [*Sepulchrally*] Yes, when you've got 'im in a nice dark place.

MISS S. James, be more respectful! We owe the Press a very great debt.

JAMES. I'm goin' to pay it, Miss.

MISS S. [*At a loss*] Poulder, this is really most——

POULDER. I'm bound to keep the Press out of temp-

tation, Miss, till I've laid it all before Lord William. 'Enry, take up the cooler. James, watch 'im till we get clear, then bring on the rest of the wine and lock up. Now, Miss.

MISS S. But where *is* Anne?

PRESS. Miss Stokes, as a lady——!

MISS S. I shall go and fetch Lord William!

POULDER. We will all go, Miss.

L. ANNE. [*Rushing out from behind his legs*] No—me!

She eludes MISS STOKES *and vanishes, followed by that distracted but still well-mannered lady.*

POULDER. [*Looking at his watch*] 'Enry, leave the cooler, and take up the wine; tell Thomas to lay it out; get the champagne into ice, and 'ave Charles 'andy in the 'all in case some literary bounder comes punctual. [HENRY *takes up the wine and goes.*

PRESS. [*Above his head*] I say, let me down. This is a bit undignified, you know. My paper's a great organ.

POULDER. [*After a moment's hesitation*] Well—take 'im down, James; he'll do some mischief among the bottles.

JAMES. 'Op off your base, and trust to me.

THE PRESS *slides off the bin's edge, is received by* JAMES, *and not landed gently.*

POULDER. [*Contemplating him*] The incident's closed; no ill-feeling, I hope?

PRESS. No-o.

POULDER. That's right. [*Clearing his throat*] While we're waitin' for Lord William—if you're interested in

wine—[*Philosophically*] you can read the history of the times in this cellar. Take 'ock. [*He points to a bin*] Not a bottle gone. German product, of course. Now, that 'ock is 'avin' the time of its life—maturin' grandly; got a wonderful chance. About the time we're bringin' ourselves to drink it, we shall be havin' the next great war. With luck that 'ock may lie there another quarter of a century, and a sweet pretty wine it'll be. I only hope I may be here to drink it. Ah! [*He shakes his head*]—but look at claret! Times are hard on claret. We're givin' it an awful doin'. Now, there's a Ponty Canny [*He points to a bin*]—if we weren't so 'opelessly allied with France, that wine would have a reasonable future. As it is—none! We drink it up and up; not more than sixty dozen left. And where's its equal to come from for a dinner wine—ah! I ask you? On the other hand, port is steady; made in a little country, all but the cobwebs and the old boot flavour; guaranteed by the British Navy; we may 'ope for the best with port. Do you drink it?

PRESS. When I get the chance.

POULDER. Ah! [*Clears his throat*] I've often wanted to ask: What do they pay you—if it's not indelicate?

[THE PRESS *shrugs his shoulders.*

Can you do it at the money?

[THE PRESS *shakes his head.*

Still—it's an easy life! I've regretted sometimes that I didn't have a shot at it myself; influencin' other people without disclosin' your identity—something very attractive about that. [*Lowering his voice*] Be-

tween man and man, now—what do you think of the situation of the country—these processions of the unemployed—the Red Flag an' the Marsillaisy in the streets—all this talk about an upheaval?

PRESS. Well, speaking as a Socialist——

POULDER. [*Astounded*] Why, I thought your paper was Tory!

PRESS. So it is. That's nothing!

POULDER. [*Open-mouthed*] Dear me! [*Pointing to the bomb*] So you really think there's something in this?

JAMES. [*Sepulchrally*] 'Igh explosive.

PRESS. [*Taking out his note-book*] Too much, anyway, to let it drop.

[*A pleasant voice calls "Poulder! Hallo!"*

POULDER. [*Forming a trumpet with his hand*] Me Lord!

As LORD WILLIAM *appears*, JAMES, *overcome by reminiscences, salutes, and is mechanically answered.* LORD WILLIAM *has "charm." His hair and moustache are crisp and just beginning to grizzle. His bearing is free, easy, and only faintly armoured. He will go far to meet you any day. He is in full evening dress.*

LORD W. [*Cheerfully*] I say, Poulder, what have you and James been doing to the Press? Liberty of the Press—it isn't what it was, but there is a limit. Where is he?

He turns to JAMES *between whom and himself there is still the freemasonry of the trenches.*

JAMES. [*Pointing to* POULDER] Be'ind the parapet, me Lord.

THE PRESS *moves out from where he has involuntarily been screened by* POULDER, *who looks at* JAMES *severely.* LORD WILLIAM *hides a smile.*

PRESS. Very glad to meet you, Lord William. My presence down here is quite involuntary.

LORD W. [*With a charming smile*] I know. The Press has to put its—er—to go to the bottom of everything. Where's this bomb, Poulder? Ah!

[*He looks into the wine cooler.*

PRESS. [*Taking out his note-book*] Could I have a word with you on the crisis, before dinner, Lord William?

LORD W. It's time you and James were up, Poulder. [*Indicating the cooler*] Look after this; tell Lady William I'll be there in a minute.

POULDER. Very good, me Lord.

He goes, followed by JAMES *carrying the cooler.*

AS THE PRESS *turns to look after them,* LORD WILLIAM *catches sight of his back.*

LORD W. I must apologise, sir. Can I brush you?

PRESS. [*Dusting himself*] Thanks; it's only behind. [*He opens his note-book*] Now, Lord William, if you'd kindly outline your views on the national situation; after such a narrow escape from death, I feel they might have a moral effect. My paper, as you know, is concerned with the deeper aspect of things. By the way, what do you value your house and collection at?

LORD W. [*Twisting his little moustache*] Really—I can't! Really!

PRESS. Might I say a quarter of a million—lifted in two seconds and a half—hundred thousand to the second. It brings it home, you know.

LORD W. No, no; dash it! No!

PRESS. [*Disappointed*] I see—not draw attention to your property in the present excited state of public feeling? Well, suppose we approach it from the viewpoint of the Anti-Sweating dinner. I have the list of guests—very weighty!

LORD W. Taken some lifting—wouldn't they?

PRESS. [*Seriously*] May I say that you designed the dinner to soften the tension, at this crisis? You saw that case, I suppose, this morning, of the woman dying of starvation in Bethnal Green?

LORD W. [*Desperately*] Yes—yes! I've been horribly affected. I always knew this slump would come after the war, sooner or later.

PRESS. [*Writing*] ". . . had predicted slump."

LORD W. You see, I've been an Anti-Sweating man for years, and I thought if only we could come together now. . . .

PRESS. [*Nodding*] I see—I see! Get Society interested in the Sweated, through the dinner. I have the menu here. [*He produces it.*

LORD W. Good God, man—more than that! I want to show the people that we stand side by side with them, as we did in the trenches. The whole thing's too jolly awful. I lie awake over it.

[*He walks up and down.*

PRESS. [*Scribbling*] One moment, please. I'll just get that down—"Too jolly awful—lies awake over it. Was wearing a white waistcoat with pearl buttons." [*At a sign of resentment from his victim*] I want the human touch, Lord William—it's everything in my paper. What do you say about this attempt to bomb you?

LORD W. Well, in a way I think it's d—d natural.

PRESS. [*Scribbling*] "Lord William thought it d—d natural."

LORD W. [*Overhearing*] No, no; don't put that down. What I mean is, I should like to get hold of those fellows that are singing the Marseillaise about the streets—fellows that have been in the war—real sports they are, you know—thorough good chaps at bottom—and say to them: "Have a feeling heart, boys; put yourself in my position." I don't believe a bit they'd want to bomb me then.

[*He walks up and down.*

PRESS. [*Scribbling and muttering*] "The idea of brotherhood——" D'you mind my saying that? Word brotherhood—always effective—always——

[*He writes.*

LORD W. [*Bewildered*] "Brotherhood!" Well, it's pure accident that I'm here and they're there. All the same, I can't pretend to be starving. Can't go out into Hyde Park and stand on a tub, can I? But if I could only show them what I feel—they're such good chaps—poor devils.

PRESS. I quite appreciate! [*He writes*] "Camel and needle's eye." You were at Eton and Oxford? Your

constituency I know. Clubs? But I can get all that. Is it your view that Christianity is on the up-grade, Lord William?

LORD W. [*Dubious*] What d'you mean by Christianity—loving-kindness and that? Of course I think that dogma's got the knock. [*He walks.*

PRESS. [*Writing*] "Lord William thought dogma had got the knock." I should like you just to develop your definition of Christianity. "Loving-kindness"—strikes rather a new note.

LORD W. *New?* What about the Sermon on the Mount?

PRESS. [*Writing*] "Refers to Sermon on Mount." I take it you don't belong to any Church, Lord William?

LORD W. [*Exasperated*] Well, really—I've been baptised and that sort of thing. But look here——

PRESS. Oh! you can trust me—I shan't say anything that you'll regret. Now, do you consider that a religious revival would help to quiet the country?

LORD W. Well, I think it would be a deuced good thing if everybody were a bit more kind.

PRESS. Ah! [*Musing*] I feel that your views are strikingly original, Lord William. If you could just open out on them a little more? How far would you apply kindness in practice?

LORD W. *Can* you apply it in theory?

PRESS. I believe it is done. But would you allow yourself to be blown up with impunity?

LORD W. Well, that's a bit extreme. But I quite sympathise with this chap. Imagine yourself in his shoes. He sees a huge house, all these bottles, us swill-

ing them down; perhaps he's got a starving wife, or consumptive kids.

PRESS. [*Writing and murmuring*] Um-m! "Kids."

LORD W. He thinks: "But for the grace of God, there swill I. Why should that blighter have everything and I nothing?" and all that.

PRESS. [*Writing*] "And all that." [*Eagerly*] Yes?

LORD W. And gradually—you see—this contrast—becomes an obsession with him. "There's got to be an example made," he thinks; and—er—he makes it, don't you know?

PRESS. [*Writing*] Ye-es? And—when you're the example?

LORD W. Well, you feel a bit blue, of course. But my point is that you quite see it.

PRESS. From the other world. Do you believe in a future life, Lord William? The public took a lot of interest in the question, if you remember, at the time of the war. It might revive at any moment, if there's to be a revolution.

LORD W. The wish is always father to the thought, isn't it?

PRESS. Yes! But—er—doesn't the question of a future life rather bear on your point about kindness? If there isn't one—why be kind?

LORD W. Well, I should say one oughtn't to be kind for any motive—that's self-interest; but just because one feels it, don't you know.

PRESS. [*Writing vigorously*] That's very new—very new!

LORD W. [*Simply*] You chaps are wonderful.

PRESS. [*Doubtfully*] You mean we're—we're——

LORD W. No, really. You have such a d—d hard time. It must be perfectly beastly to interview fellows like me.

PRESS. Oh! Not at all, Lord William. Not at all. I assure you compared with a literary man, it's—it's almost heavenly.

LORD W. You must have a wonderful knowledge of things.

PRESS. [*Bridling a little*] Well—I shouldn't say that.

LORD W. I don't see how you can avoid it. You turn your hands to everything.

PRESS. [*Modestly*] Well—yes, yes.

LORD W. I say: Is there really going to be a revolution, or are you making it up, you Press?

PRESS. We don't know. We never know whether we come before the event, or it comes before us.

LORD W. That's very deep—very deep. D'you mind lending me your note-book a moment. I'd like to stick that down. All right, I'll use the other end.

[THE PRESS *hands it hypnotically.*

LORD W. [*Jotting*] Thanks awfully. Now what's your real opinion of the situation?

PRESS. As a man or a Press man?

LORD W. Is there any difference?

PRESS. Is there any connection?

LORD W. Well, as a man.

PRESS. As a man, I think it's rotten.

LORD W. [*Jotting*] "Rotten." And as a pressman?

PRESS. [*Smiling*] Prime.

LORD W. What! Like a Stilton cheese. Ha, ha!

[*He is about to write.*

PRESS. My stunt, Lord William. *You* said that.

[*He jots it on his cuff.*

LORD W. But look here! Would you say that a strong press movement would help to quiet the country?

PRESS. Well, as you ask me, Lord William, I'll tell you. No newspapers for a month would do the trick.

LORD W. [*Jotting*] By Jove! That's brilliant.

PRESS. Yes, but I should starve. [*He suddenly looks up, and his eyes, like gimlets, bore their way into* LORD WILLIAM'S *pleasant, troubled face*] Lord William, you could do me a real kindness. Authorise me to go and interview the fellow who left the bomb here; I've got his address. I promise you to do it most discreetly. Fact is—well—I'm in low water. Since the war we simply can't get sensation enough for the new taste. Now, if I could have an article headed: "Bombed and Bomber"—sort of double interview, you know, it'd very likely set me on my legs again. [*Very earnestly*] Look! [*He holds out his frayed wristbands.*

LORD W. [*Grasping his hand*] My dear chap, certainly. Go and interview this blighter, and then bring him round here. You can do that for *me*. I'd very much like to see him, as a matter of fact.

PRESS. Thanks awfully; I shall never forget it. Oh! might I have my note-book?

[LORD WILLIAM *hands it back.*

LORD W. And look here, if there's anything—when a fellow's fortunate and another's not——

[*He puts his hand into his breast pocket.*

PRESS. Oh, thank you! But you see, I shall have to write you up a bit, Lord William. The old aristocracy—you know what the public still expects; if you were to lend me money, you might feel——

LORD W. By Jove! Never should have dreamt——

PRESS. No! But it wouldn't do. Have you a photograph of yourself.

LORD W. Not on me.

PRESS. Pity! By the way, has it occurred to you that there may be another bomb on the premises?

LORD W. Phew! I'll have a look.

He looks at his watch, and begins hurriedly searching the bins, bending down and going on his knees. THE PRESS *reverses the note-book again and sketches him.*

PRESS. [*To himself*] Ah! That'll do. "Lord William examines the foundations of his house."

A voice calls "Bill!" THE PRESS *snaps the note-book to, and looks up. There, where the "communication trench" runs in, stands a tall and elegant woman in the extreme of evening dress.*

[*With presence of mind*] Lady William? You'll find Lord William—Oh! Have you a photograph of him?

LADY W. Not on me.

PRESS. [*Eyeing her*] Er—no—I suppose not—no. Excuse me! [*He sidles past her and is gone.*

LADY W. [*With lifted eyebrows*] Bill!

LORD W. [*Emerging, dusting his knees*] Hallo, Nell! I was just making sure there wasn't another bomb.

LADY W. Yes; that's why I came down. Who was that person?

LORD W. Press.

LADY W. He looked awfully yellow. I hope you haven't been giving yourself away.

LORD W. [*Dubiously*] Well, I don't know. They're like corkscrews.

LADY W. What did he ask you?

LORD W. What didn't he?

LADY W. Well, what did you tell him?

LORD W. That I'd been baptised—but he promised not to put it down.

LADY W. Bill, you are absurd.

[*She gives a light little laugh.*

LORD W. I don't remember anything else, except that it was quite natural we should be bombed, don't you know.

LADY W. Why, what harm have we done?

LORD W. Been born, my dear. [*Suddenly serious*] I say, Nell, how am I to tell what this fellow felt when he left that bomb here?

LADY W. Why do you want to?

LORD W. Out there one used to know what one's men felt.

LADY W. [*Staring*] My dear boy, I really don't think you ought to see the Press; it always upsets you.

LORD W. Well! Why should you and I be going to eat ourselves silly to improve the condition of the sweated, when——

LADY W. [*Calmly*] When they're going to "im-

prove" ours, if we don't look out. We've got to get in first, Bill.

LORD W. [*Gloomily*] I know. It's all fear. That's it! Here we are, and here we shall stay—as if there'd never been a war.

LADY W. Well, thank heaven there's no "front" to a revolution. You and I can go to glory together this time. Compact! Anything that's on, I'm to share in.

LORD W. Well, in reason.

LADY W. No, in rhyme, too.

LORD W. I say, your dress!

LADY W. Yes, Poulder tried to stop me, but I wasn't going to have you blown up without me.

LORD W. You duck. You do look stunning. Give us a kiss!

LADY W. [*Starting back*] Oh, Bill! Don't touch me —your hands!

LORD W. Never mind, my mouth's clean.

They stand about a yard apart, and bending their faces towards each other, kiss on the lips.

L. ANNE. [*Appearing suddenly from the "communication trench," and tip-toeing silently between them*] Oh, Mum! You and Daddy *are* wasting time! Dinner's ready, you know!

CURTAIN

ACT II

The single room of old MRS. LEMMY, *in a small grey house in Bethnal Green, the room of one cumbered by little save age, and the crockery débris of the past. A bed, a cupboard, a coloured portrait of Queen Victoria, and—of all things—a fiddle, hanging on the wall. By the side of old* MRS. LEMMY *in her chair is a pile of corduroy trousers, her day's sweated sewing, and a small table. She sits with her back to the window, through which, in the last of the light, the opposite side of the little grey street is visible under the evening sky, where hangs one white cloud shaped like a horned beast. She is still sewing, and her lips move. Being old, and lonely, she has that habit of talking to herself, distressing to those who cannot overhear. From the smack of her tongue she was once a West Country cottage woman; from the look of her creased, parchmenty face, she was once a pretty girl with black eyes, in which there is still much vitality. The door is opened with difficulty and a little girl enters, carrying a pile of unfinished corduroy trousers nearly as large as herself. She puts them down against the wall, and advances. She is eleven or twelve years old; large-eyed, dark-haired, and sallow. Half a woman of this and*

half of another world, except when as now, she is as irresponsible a bit of life as a little flowering weed growing out of a wall. She stands looking at MRS. LEMMY *with dancing eyes.*

L. AIDA. I've brought yer to-morrer's trahsers. Y'nt yer finished wiv to-dy's? I want to tyke 'em.

MRS. L. No, me dear. Drat this last one—me old fengers!

L. AIDA. I learnt some poytry to-dy—I did.

MRS. L. Well, I never!

L. AIDA. [*Reciting with unction*]

"Little lamb who myde thee?
Dost thou know who myde thee,
Gyve thee life and byde thee feed
By the stream and o'er the mead;
Gyve thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing, woolly, bright;
Gyve thee such a tender voice,
Myking all the vyles rejoice.
Little lamb who myde thee?
Dost thou know who myde thee?"

MRS. L. Tes wonderful what things they tache yu nowadays.

L. AIDA. When I grow up I'm goin' to 'ave a revolver an' shoot the people that steals my jools.

MRS. L. Deary-me, wherever du yu get yure notions?

L. AIDA. An' I'm goin' to ride on an 'orse be'ind a man; an' I'm goin' to ryce trynes in my motor car.

MRS. L. [*Dryly*] Ah! Yu'um gwine to be very busy, that's sartin. Can you sew?

L. AIDA. [*With a smile*] Nao.

MRS. L. Don' they tache yu that, there?

L. AIDA. [*Blending contempt and a lingering curiosity*] Nao.

MRS. L. Tes wonderful genteel.

L. AIDA. I can sing, though.

MRS. L. Let's 'ear yu, then.

L. AIDA. [*Shaking her head*] I can ply the pianner. I can ply a tune.

MRS. L. Whose pianner?

L. AIDA. Mrs. Brahn's when she's gone aht.

MRS. L. Well, yu are gettin' edjucation! Du they tache yu to love yure neighbours?

L. AIDA. [*Ineffably*] Nao. [*Straying to the window*] Mrs. Lemmy, what's the moon?

MRS. L. The mune? Us yused to zay 'twas made o' crame cheese.

L. AIDA. I can see it.

MRS. L. Ah! Don' yu never go wishin' for it, me dear.

L. AIDA. I daon't.

MRS. L. Folks as wish for the mune never du no gude.

L. AIDA. [*Craning out, brilliant*] I'm goin' dahn in the street. I'll come back for yer trahsers.

MRS. L. Well, go yu, then, an' get a breath o' fresh air in yure chakes. I'll sune 'a feneshed.

L. AIDA. [*Solemnly*] I'm goin' to be a dancer, I am.

She rushes suddenly to the door, pulls it open, and is gone.

MRS. L. [*Looking after her, and talking to herself*] Ah! 'Er've a-got all 'er troubles before 'er! "Little lamb, u made 'ee?" [*Cackling*] 'Tes a funny world, tu!

[*She sings to herself.*

"There is a green 'ill far away
Without a city wall,
Where our dear Lord was crucified,
'U died to save us all."

The door is opened, and LEMMY *comes in; a little man with a stubble of dark moustache and spiky dark hair; large, peculiar eyes he has, and a look of laying his ears back, a look of doubting, of perversity with laughter up the sleeve, that grows on those who have to do with gas and water. He shuts the door.*

MRS. L. Well, Bob, I 'aven't a-seen yu this tu weeks.

LEMMY *comes up to his mother, and sits down on a stool, sets a tool-bag between his knees, and speaks in a cockney voice.*

LEMMY. Well, old lydy o' leisure! Wot would y' 'ave for supper, if yer could choose—salmon wivaht the tin, an' tipsy cyke?

MRS. L. [*Shaking her head and smiling blandly*] That's showy. Toad in the 'ole I'd 'ave—and a glass o' port wine.

LEMMY. Providential. [*He opens a tool-bag*] Wot d'yer think I've got yer?

MRS. L. I 'ope yu've a-got yureself a job, my son!

LEMMY. [*With his peculiar smile*] Yus, or I couldn't 'ave afforded yer this. [*He takes out a bottle*] Not 'arf! This'll put the blood into yer. Pork wine—once in the cellars of the gryte. We'll drink the ryyal family in this.

[*He apostrophises the portrait of Queen Victoria.*

MRS. L. Ah! She was a praaper gude queen. I see 'er once, when 'er was bein' burried.

LEMMY. Ryalties—I got nothin' to sy agynst 'em in this country. But the *Styte* 'as got to 'ave its pipes seen to. The 'ole show's goin' up pop. Yer'll wyke up one o' these dyes, old lydy, and find yerself on the roof, wiv nuffin' between yer an' the grahnd.

MRS. L. I can't tell what yu'm talkin' about.

LEMMY. We're goin' to 'ave a triumpherat in this country—Liberty, Equality, Fraternity; an' if yer arsk me, they won't be in power six months before they've cut each other's throats. But I don't carc—I want to see the blood flow! [*Dispassionately*] I don' care 'oose blood it is. I want to see it flow!

MRS. L. [*Indulgently*] Yu'm a funny boy, that's sartin.

LEMMY. [*Carving at the cork with a knife*] This 'ere cork is like Sasiety—rotten; it's old—old an' moulderin'. [*He holds up a bit of cork on the point of the knife*] Crumblin' under the wax, it is. In goes the screw an' out comes the cork. [*With unction*]—an' the blood

flows. [*Tipping the bottle, he lets a drop fall into the middle of his hand, and licks it up. Gazing with queer and doubting commiseration at his mother*] Well, old dear, wot shall we 'ave it aht of—the gold loving-cup, or—what? 'Ave yer supper fust, though, or it'll go to yer 'ead! [*He goes to the cupboard and takes out a dish in which a little bread is sopped in a little milk*] Cold pap! 'Ow can yer? 'Yn't yer got a kipper in the 'ouse?

MRS. L. [*Admiring the bottle*] Port wine! 'Tis a brave treat! I'll 'ave it out of the "Present from Margitt," Bob. I tuk 'ee therr by excursion when yu was six months. Yu 'ad a shrimp an' it choked yu praaperly. Yu was always a squeamy little feller. I can't never think 'ow yu managed in the war-time, makin' they shells.

LEMMY, *who has brought to the table two mugs and blown the dust out of them, fills them with port, and hands one to his mother, who is eating her bread and milk.*

LEMMY. Ah! Nothin' worried me, 'cept the want o' soap.

MRS. L. [*Cackling gently*] So it du still, then! Luke at yure face. Yu never was a clean boy, like Jim.

She puts out a thin finger and touches his cheek, whereon is a black smudge.

LEMMY. [*Scrubbing his cheek with his sleeve*] All right! Y'see, I come stryte 'ere, to get rid o' this.

[*He drinks.*

MRS. L. [*Eating her bread and milk*] 'Tes a pity yu'm not got a wife to see't yu wash yureself.

LEMMY [*Goggling*] Wife! Not me—I daon't want ter myke no food for pahder. Wot oh!—they said, time o' the war—ye're fightin' for yer children's 'eritage. Well, wot's the 'eritage like, now we've got it? Empty as a shell before yer put the 'igh explosive in. Wot's it like? [*Warming to his theme*] Like a prophecy in the pypers—not a bit more substantial.

MRS. L. [*Slightly hypnotised*] How 'e du talk! The gas goes to yure 'ead, I think!

LEMMY. I did the gas to-dy in the cellars of an 'ouse where the wine was mountains 'igh. A regiment couldn't 'a drunk it. Marble pillars in the 'all, butler broad as an observytion balloon, an' four conscientious khaki footmen. When the guns was roarin' the talk was all for no more o' them glorious weeds—style an' luxury was orf. See wot it is naow. You've got a bare crust in the cupboard 'ere, I works from 'and to mouth in a glutted market—an' there they stand abaht agyne in their britches in the 'ouses o' the gryte. I was reg'lar overcome by it. I left a thing in that cellar—I left a thing. . . . It'll be a bit ork'ard for me to-morrer. [*Drinks from his mug.*

MRS. L. [*Placidly, feeling the warmth of the little she has drunk*] What thing?

LEMMY. Wot thing? Old lydy, ye're like a winkle afore yer opens 'er—I never see anything so peaceful. 'Ow d'yer manage it?

MRS. L. Settin' 'ere and thenkin'.

LEMMY. Wot abaht?

MRS. L. We-el—Money, an' the works o' God.

LEMMY. Ah! So yer give *me* a thought sometimes.

MRS. L. [*Lifting her mug*] Yu ought never to ha' spent yure money on this, Bob!

LEMMY. I thought that meself.

MRS. L. Last time I 'ad a glass o' port wine was the day yure brother Jim went to Ameriky. [*Smacking her lips*] For a teetotal drink, it du warm 'ee!

LEMMY. [*Raising his mug*] Well, 'ere's to the British revolution! 'Ere's to the conflygrytion in the sky!

MRS. L. [*Comfortably*] So as to kape up therr, 'twon't du no 'arm.

LEMMY *goes to the window and unhooks his fiddle; he stands with it halfway to his shoulder. Suddenly he opens the window and leans out. A confused murmur of voices is heard, and a snatch of the Marseillaise, sung by a girl. Then the shuffling tramp of feet, and figures are passing in the street.*

LEMMY. [*Turning—excited*] Wot'd I tell yer, old lydy? There it is—there it is!

MRS. L. [*Placidly*] What is?

LEMMY. The revolution. [*He cranes out*] They've got it on a barrer. Cheerio!

VOICE. [*Answering*] Cheerio!

LEMMY. [*Leaning out*] I sy—you 'yn't tykin' the body, are yer?

VOICE. Nao.

LEMMY. Did she die o' starvytion—O.K.?

VOICE. She bloomin' well did; I know 'er brother.

LEMMY. Ah! That'll do us a bit o' good!

VOICE. Cheerio!

LEMMY. So long!

VOICE. So long!

The girl's voice is heard again in the distance singing the Marseillaise. The door is flung open and LITTLE AIDA *comes running in again.*

LEMMY. 'Allo, little Aida!

L. AIDA. 'Allo, I been follerin' the corfin. It's better than an 'orse dahn!

MRS. L. What coffin?

L. AIDA. Why, 'er's wot died o' starvytion up the street. They're goin' to tyke it to 'Yde Pawk, and 'oller.

MRS. L. Well, never yu mind wot they'm goin' to du. Yu wait an' take my trousers like a gude gell.

She puts her mug aside and takes up her unfinished pair of trousers. But the wine has entered her fingers, and strength to push the needle through is lacking.

LEMMY. [*Tuning his fiddle*] Wot'll yer 'ave, little Aida? "Dead March in Saul" or "When the fields was white wiv dysies"?

L. AIDA. [*With a hop and a brilliant smile*] Aoh yus! "When the fields"——

MRS. L. [*With a gesture of despair*] Deary me! I 'aven't a-got the strength!

LEMMY. Leave 'em alone, old dear! No one'll be goin' aht wivaht trahsers to-night 'cos yer leaves that one undone. Little Aida, fold 'em up!

LITTLE AIDA *methodically folds the five finished pairs of trousers into a pile.* LEMMY *begins playing. A smile comes on the face of* MRS. LEMMY, *who is rubbing her fingers.* LITTLE AIDA, *trousers over arm, goes and stares at* LEMMY *playing.*

LEMMY. [*Stopping*] Little Aida, one o' vese dyes yer'll myke an actress. I can see it in yer fyce!

[LITTLE AIDA *looks at him wide-eyed.*

MRS. L. Don't 'ee putt things into 'er 'ead, Bob!

LEMMY. 'Tyn't 'er 'ead, old lydy—it's lower. She wants feedin'—feed 'er an' she'll rise. [*He strikes into the "Machichi"*] Look at 'er naow. I tell yer there's a fortune in 'er.

[LITTLE AIDA *has put out her tongue.*

MRS. L. I'd suner there was a gude 'eart in 'er than any fortune.

L. AIDA. [*Hugging her pile of trousers*] It's thirteen pence three farthin's I've got to bring yer, an' a penny aht for me, mykes twelve three farthin's. [*With the same little hop and sudden smile*] I'm goin' to ride back on a bus, I am.

LEMMY. Well, you myke the most of it up there; it's the nearest you'll ever git to 'eaven.

MRS. L. Don' yu discourage 'er, Bob; she'm a gude little thing, an't yu, dear?

L. AIDA. [*Simply*] Yus.

LEMMY. Not 'arf. Wot c'her do wiv yesterdy's penny?

L. AIDA. Movies.

LEMMY. An' the dy before?

L. AIDA. Movies.

LEMMY. Wot'd I tell yer, old lydy—she's got vicious tystes, she'll finish in the theayter yet. Tyke my tip, little Aida; you put every penny into yer foundytions, yer'll get on the boards quicker that wy.

MRS. L. Don' yu pay no 'eed to his talk.

L. AIDA. I daon't.

LEMMY. Would yer like a sip aht o' my mug?

L. AIDA. [*Brilliant*] Yus.

MRS. L. Not at yure age, me dear, though it is teetotal.

LITTLE AIDA *puts her head on one side, like a dog trying to understand.*

LEMMY. Well, 'ave one o' my gum-drops.

[*Holds out a paper.*

LITTLE AIDA, *brilliant, takes a flat, dark substance from it, and puts it in her mouth.*

Give me a kiss, an' I'll give yer a penny.

LITTLE AIDA *shakes her head, and leans out of window.*

Muvver, she daon't know the valyer of money.

MRS. L. Never mind 'im, me dear.

L. AIDA. [*Sucking the gum-drop—with difficulty*] There's a taxi-cab at the corner.

LITTLE AIDA *runs to the door. A figure stands in the doorway; she skids round him and out.* THE PRESS *comes in.*

LEMMY. [*Dubiously*] Wot—oh!

PRESS. Mr. Lemmy?

LEMMY. The syme.

PRESS. I'm from the Press.

LEMMY. Blimy.

PRESS. They told me at your place you were very likely here.

LEMMY. Yus—I left Downin' Street a bit early to-dy! [*He twangs the fiddle-strings pompously.*

PRESS. [*Taking out his note-book and writing*] "Fiddles while Rome is burning!" Mr. Lemmy, it's my business at this very critical time to find out what the nation's thinking. Now, as a representative working man——

LEMMY. That's me.

PRESS. You can help me. What are your views?

LEMMY. [*Putting down fiddle*] Voos? Sit dahn!

THE PRESS *sits on the stool which* LEMMY *has vacated.*

The Press—my Muvver. Seventy-seven. She's a wonder; 'yn't yer, old dear?

PRESS. Very happy to make your acquaintance, Ma'am. [*He writes*] "Mrs. Lemmy, one of the veterans of industry——" By the way, I've just passed a lot of people following a coffin.

LEMMY. Centre o' the cyclone—cyse o' starvytion; you 'ad 'er in the pyper this mornin'.

PRESS. Ah, yes! Tragic occurrence. [*Looking at the trousers*] Hub of the Sweated Industries just here. I especially want to get at the heart——

MRS. L. 'Twasn't the 'eart, 'twas the stomach.

PRESS. [*Writing*] "Mrs. Lemmy goes straight to the point."

LEMMY. Mister, is it my voos or Muvver's yer want?

PRESS. Both.

LEMMY. 'Cos if yer get Muvver's, yer won't 'ave time for mine. I tell yer stryte [*Confidentially*] she's got a glawss o' port wine in 'er. Naow, mind yer, I'm not anxious to be intervooed. On the other 'and, anyfink I might 'ave to sy of valyer—— There is a clawss o' politician that 'as nuffin to sy—— Aoh! an' daon't 'e sy it just! I dunno wot pyper yer represent——

PRESS. [*Smiling*] Well, Mr. Lemmy, it has the biggest influ——

LEMMY. They all 'as that; dylies, weeklies, evenin's, Sundyes; but it's of no consequence—my voos are open and above-board. Naow, wot shall we begin abaht?

PRESS. Yourself, if you please. And I'd like you to know at once that my paper wants the human note, the real heart-beat of things.

LEMMY. I see; sensytion! Well, 'ere am I—a fust-clawss plumber's assistant—in a job to-dy an' out to-morrer. There's a 'eart-beat in that, I tell yer. 'Oo knows wot the morrer 'as for me!

PRESS. [*Writing*] "The great human issue—Mr. Lemmy touches it at once."

LEMMY. I sy—keep my nyme aht o' this; I don' go in fer self-advertisement.

PRESS. [*Writing*] "True working-man—modest as usual."

LEMMY. I daon't want to embarrass the Gover'-ment. They're so ticklish ever since they got the 'abit, war-time, o' mindin' wot people said.

PRESS. Right-o!

LEMMY. For instance, suppose there's goin' to be a revolution—— [THE PRESS *writes with energy.* 'Ow does it touch me? Like this: I my go up—I cawn't come dahn; no more can Muvver.

MRS. L. [*Surprisingly*] Us all goes down into the grave.

PRESS. "Mrs. Lemmy interjects the deeper note."

LEMMY. Naow, the gryte—they can come dahn, but they cawn't go up! See! Put two an' two together, an' that's 'ow it touches me. [*He utters a throaty laugh*] 'Ave yer got that?

PRESS. [*Quizzical*] Not go up? What about bombs, Mr. Lemmy?

LEMMY. [*Dubious*] Wot abaht 'em? I s'pose ye're on the comic pypers? 'Ave yer noticed wot a weakness they 'ave for the 'orrible?

PRESS. [*Writing*] "A grim humour peeped out here and there through the earnestness of his talk."

[*He sketches* LEMMY'S *profile.*

LEMMY. We 'ad an explosion in my factory time o' the war, that would just ha' done for you comics. [*He meditates*] Lord! They *was* after it too,—they an' the Sundyes; but the Censor did 'em. Strike me, I could tell yer things!

PRESS. That's what I want, Mr. Lemmy; tell me things!

LEMMY. [*Musing*] It's a funny world, 'yn't it? 'Ow we did blow each other up! [*Getting up to admire*] I sy, I shall be syfe there. That won't betry me anonymiety. Why! I looks like the Prime Minister!

PRESS. [*Rather hurt*] You were going to tell me things.

LEMMY. Yus, an' they'll be the troof, too.

PRESS. I hope so; we don't——

LEMMY. Wot oh!

PRESS. [*A little confused*] We always try to verify——

LEMMY. Yer leave it at tryin', daon't yer? Never, mind, ye're a gryte institootion. Blimy, yer do have jokes wiv it, spinnin' rahnd on yer own tyles, denyin' to-dy wot ye're goin' to print to-morrer. Ah, well! Ye're like all of us below the line o' comfort—live dyngerously—every dy yer last. That's wy I'm interested in the future.

PRESS. Well now—the future. [*Writing*] "He prophesies."

LEMMY. It's syfer, 'yn't it? [*He winks*] No one never looks back on prophecies. I remembers an editor—spring o' 1915—stykin' his reputytion the war'd be over in the follerin' October. Increased 'is circulytion abaht 'arf a million by it. 1917—an' war still on—'ad 'is readers gone back on 'im? Nao! They was increasin' like rabbits. Prophesy wot people want to believe, an' ye're syfe. Naow, I'll styke my reputytion on somethin', you tyke it dahn word for word. This

country's goin' to the dawgs—— Naow, 'ere's the sensytion—unless we gets a new religion.

PRESS. Ah! Now for it—yes?

LEMMY. In one word: "Kindness." Daon't mistyke me, nao sickly sentiment and nao patronizin'. Me as kind to the millionaire as 'im to me. [*Fills his mug and drinks.*]

PRESS. [*Struck*] That's queer! Kindness! [*Writing*] "Extremes meet. Bombed and bomber breathing the same music."

LEMMY. But 'ere's the interestin' pynt. Can it be done wivaht blood?

PRESS. [*Writing*] "He doubts."

LEMMY. No daht wotever. It cawn't! Blood—and—kindness! Spill the blood o' them that aren't kind—an' there ye are!

PRESS. But pardon me, how are you to tell?

LEMMY. Blimy, they leaps to the heye!

PRESS. [*Laying down his note-book*] I say, let me talk to you as man to man for a moment.

LEMMY. Orl right. Give it a rest!

PRESS. Your sentiments are familiar to me. I've got a friend on the Press who's very keen on Christ and kindness; and wants to strangle the last king with the—hamstrings of the last priest.

LEMMY. [*Greatly intrigued*] Not 'arf! Does 'e?

PRESS. Yes. But have you thought it out? Because he hasn't.

LEMMY. The difficulty is—where to stop.

PRESS. Where to begin.

LEMMY. Lawd! I could begin almost anywhere. Why, every month abaht, there's a cove turns me aht of a job 'cos I daon't do just wot 'e likes. *They'd* 'ave to go. I tell yer stryte—the Temple wants cleanin' up.

PRESS. Ye-es. If I wrote what I thought, I should get the sack as quick as you. D'you say that justifies me in shedding the blood of my bosses?

LEMMY. The yaller Press 'as got no blood—'as it? You shed their ile an' vinegar—that's wot you've got to do. Stryte—do yer believe in the noble mission o' the Press?

PRESS. [*Enigmatically*] Mr. Lemmy, I'm a Press-man.

LEMMY. [*Goggling*] I see. Not much! [*Gently jogging his mother's elbow*] Wyke up, old lydy!

For MRS. LEMMY, *who has been sipping placidly at her port, is nodding. The evening has drawn in.* LEMMY *strikes a match on his trousers and lights a candle.*

Blood an' kindness—that's what's wanted—'specially blood! The 'istory o' me an' my family'll show yer that. Tyke my bruvver Fred—crushed by burycrats. Tyke Muvver 'erself. Talk o' the wrongs o' the people! I tell yer the foundytions is rotten. [*He empties the bottle into his mother's mug*] Daon't mind the mud at the bottom, old lydy—it's all strengthenin'! You tell the Press, Muvver. She can talk abaht the pawst.

PRESS. [*Taking up his note-book, and becoming again his professional self*] Yes, Mrs. Lemmy? "Age and Youth—Past and Present——"

MRS. L. Were yu talkin' about Fred? [*The port has warmed her veins, the colour in her eyes and cheeks has deepened*] My son Fred was always a gude boy—never did nothin' before 'e married. I can see Fred [*She bends forward a little in her chair, looking straight before her*] comin' in wi' a pheasant 'e'd found—terrible 'e was at findin' pheasants. When father died, an' yu was comin', Bob, Fred 'e said to me: "Don't yu never cry, Mother, I'll look after 'ee." An' so 'e did, till 'e married that day six months an' tuke to the drink in sorrer. 'E wasn't never the same boy again—not Fred. An' now 'e's in That. I can see poor Fred——

She slowly wipes a tear out of the corner of an eye with the back of her finger.

PRESS. [*Puzzled*] In—That?

LEMMY. [*Sotto voce*] Come orf it! Prison! 'S wot she calls it.

MRS. L. [*Cheerful*] They say life's a vale o' sorrows. Well, so 'tes, but don' du to let yureself thenk so.

PRESS. And so you came to London, Mrs. Lemmy?

MRS. L. Same year as father died. With the four o' them—that's my son Fred, an' my son Jim, an' my son Tom, an' Alice. Bob there, 'e was born in London —an' a praaper time I 'ad of et.

PRESS. [*Writing*] "Her heroic struggles with poverty——"

MRS. L. Worked in a laundry, I ded, at fifteen shellin's a week, an' brought 'em all up on et till Alice 'ad the gallopin' consumption. I can see poor Alice wi' the little red spots in 'er cheeks—an' I not knowin'

wot to du wi' her—but I always kept up their buryin' money. Funerals is very dear; Mr. Lemmy was six pound ten.

PRESS. "High price of Mr. Lemmy."

MRS. L. I've a-got the money for when my time come; never touch et, no matter 'ow things are. Better a little goin' short here below, an' enter the kingdom of 'eaven independent.

PRESS. [*Writing*] "Death before dishonour—heroine of the slums. Dickens—Betty Higden."

MRS. L. No, sir. Mary Lemmy. I've seen a-many die, I 'ave; an' not one grievin'. I often says to meself: [*With a little laugh*] "Me dear, when yu go, yu go 'appy. Don' yu never fret about that," I says. An' so I will; I'll go 'appy.

She stays quite still a moment, and behind her LEMMY *draws one finger across his face.*

[*Smiling*] "Yure old fengers'll 'ave a rest. Think o' that!" I says. "'Twill be a brave change." I can see myself lyin' there an' duin' nothin'.

Again a pause, while MRS. LEMMY *sees herself doing nothing.*

LEMMY. Tell abaht Jim, old lydy.

MRS. L. My son Jim 'ad a family o' seven in six years. "I don' know 'ow 'tes, Mother," 'e used to say to me; "they just sim to come!" That was Jim —never knu from day to day what was comin'. "Therr's another of 'em dead," 'e used to say, "'tes funny, tu." "Well," I used to say to 'im; "no wonder, poor little things, livin' in they model dwellin's.

Therr's no air for 'em," I used to say. "Well," 'e used to say, "what can I du, Mother? Can't afford to live in Park Lane." An' 'e tuke an' went to Ameriky. [*Her voice for the first time is truly doleful*] An' never came back. Fine feller. So that's my four sons—One's dead, an' one's in—That, an' one's in Ameriky, an' Bob 'ere, poor boy, 'e always was a talker.

LEMMY, *who has re-seated himself in the window and taken up his fiddle, twangs the strings.*

PRESS. And now a few words about your work, Mrs. Lemmy?

MRS. L. Well, I sews.

PRESS. [*Writing*] "Sews." Yes?

MRS. L. [*Holding up her unfinished pair of trousers*] I putt in the button'oles, I stretches the flies, I lines the crutch, I putt on this bindin', [*She holds up the calico that binds the top*] I sews on the buttons, I presses the seams—Tuppence three farthin's the pair.

PRESS. Twopence three farthings a pair! Worse than a penny a line!

MRS. L. In a gude day I gets thru four pairs, but they'm gettin' plaguey 'ard for my old fengers.

PRESS. [*Writing*] "A monumental figure, on whose labour is built the mighty edifice of our industrialism."

LEMMY. I sy—that's good. Yer'll keep that, won't yer?

MRS. L. I finds me own cotton, tuppence three farthin's, and other expension is a penny three farthin's.

PRESS. And are you an exception, Mrs. Lemmy?

MRS. L. What's that?

LEMMY. Wot price the uvvers, old lydy? Is there a lot of yer sewin' yer fingers orf at tuppence 'ypenny the pair?

MRS. L. I can't tell yu that. I never sees nothin' in 'ere. I pays a penny to that little gell to bring me a dozen pair an' fetch 'em back. Poor little thing, she'm 'ardly strong enough to carry 'em. Feel! They'm very 'eavy!

PRESS. On the conscience of Society!

LEMMY. I sy—put that dahn, won't yer?

PRESS. Have things changed much since the war, Mrs. Lemmy?

MRS. L. Cotton's a lot dearer.

PRESS. All round, I mean.

MRS. L. Aw! Yu don' never get no change, not in my profession. [*She oscillates the trousers*] I've a-been in trousers fifteen year; ever since I got tu old for laundry.

PRESS. [*Writing*] "For fifteen years sewn trousers." What would a good week be, Mrs. Lemmy?

MRS. L. 'Tes a very gude week, five shellin's.

LEMMY. [*From the window*] Bloomin' millionairess, Muvver. She's lookin' forward to 'eaven, where vey don't wear no trahsers.

MRS. L. [*With spirit*] 'Tidn' for me to zay whether they du. An' 'tes on'y when I'm a bit low-sperrity-like as I wants to go therr. What I am a-lukin' forward to, though, 'tes a day in the country. I've not a-had one since before the war. A kind lady brought

me in that bit of 'eather; 'tes wonderful sweet stuff when the 'oney's in et. When I was a little gell I used to zet in the 'eather gatherin' the whorts, an' me little mouth all black wi' eatin' them. 'Twas in the 'eather I used to zet, Sundays, courtin'. All flesh is grass—an' 'tesn't no bad thing—grass.

PRESS [*Writing*] "The old paganism of the country." What is your view of life, Mrs. Lemmy?

LEMMY. [*Suddenly*] Wot is 'er voo of life? Shall I tell yer mine? Life's a disease—a blinkin' oak-apple! Daon't myke no mistyke. An' 'uman life's a yumourous disease; that's all the difference. Why—wot else can it be? See the bloomin' promise an' the blighted performance—different as a 'eadline to the noos inside. But yer couldn't myke Muvver see vat—not if yer talked to 'er for a week. Muvver still believes in fings. She's a country gell; at a 'undred and fifty she'll be a country gell, won't yer, old lydy?

MRS. L. Well, 'tesn't never been 'ome to me in London. I lived in the country forty year—I did my lovin' there; I burried father therr. Therr bain't nothin' in life, yu know, but a bit o' lovin'—all said an' done; bit o' lovin', with the wind, an' the stars out.

LEMMY. [*In a loud apologetic whisper*] She 'yn't often like this. I told yer she'd got a glawss o' port in 'er.

MRS. L. 'Tes a brave pleasure, is lovin'. I likes to zee et in young folk. I likes to zee 'em kissin'; shows the 'eart in 'em. 'Tes the 'eart makes the world go round; 'tesn't nothin' else, in my opinion.

PRESS. [*Writing*] "—sings the swan song of the heart."

MRS. L. [*Overhearing*] No, I *never* yeard a swan sing—never! But I tell 'ee what I 'ave 'eard; the gells singin' in th' orchard 'angin' up the clothes to dry, an' the cuckoos callin' back to 'em. [*Smiling*] There's a-many songs in the country—the 'eart is free-like in th' country!

LEMMY. [*Sotto voce*] Gi' me the Strand at ar' past nine.

PRESS. [*Writing*] "Town and country——"

MRS. L. 'Tidn't like that in London; one day's jest like another. Not but what therr's a 'eap o' kind-'eartedness 'ere.

LEMMY. [*Gloomily*] Kind-'eartedness! I daon't fink! "Boys an' gells come out to play."

[*He plays the old tune on his fiddle.*

MRS. L. [*Singing*] "Boys an' gells come out to play. The mune is shinin' bright as day." [*She laughs*] I used to sing like a lark when I was a gell.

[LITTLE AIDA *enters.*

L. AIDA. There's 'undreds follerin' the corfin. 'Yn't you goin', Mr. Lemmy—it's dahn your wy!

LEMMY. [*Dubiously*] Well yus—I s'pose they'll miss me.

L. AIDA. Aoh! Tyke me!

PRESS. What's this?

LEMMY. The revolution in 'Yde Pawk.

PRESS. [*Struck*] In Hyde Park? The very thing. I'll take you down. My taxi's waiting.

L. AIDA. Yus; it's breathin' 'ard, at the corner.

PRESS. [*Looking at his watch*] Ah! and Mrs. Lemmy. There's an Anti-Sweating Meeting going on at a house in Park Lane. We can get there in twenty minutes if we shove along. I want you to tell them about the trouser-making. You'll be a sensation!

LEMMY. [*To himself*] Sensytion! 'E cawn't keep orf it!

MRS. L. Anti-Sweat. Poor fellers! I 'ad one come to see me before the war, an' they'm still goin' on? Wonderful, an't it?

PRESS. Come, Mrs. Lemmy; drive in a taxi, beautiful moonlit night; and they'll give you a splendid cup of tea.

MRS. L. [*Unmoved*] Ah! I cudn't never du without my tea. There's not an avenin' but I thinks to meself: Now, me dear, yu've a-got one more to fennish, an' then yu'll 'ave yure cup o' tea. Thank you for callin', all the same.

LEMMY. Better siccumb to the temptytion, old lydy; joyride wiv the Press; marble floors, pillars o' gold; conscientious footmen; lovely lydies; scuppers runnin' tea! An' the revolution goin' on across the wy. 'Eaven's nuffink to Pawk Lyne.

PRESS. Come along, Mrs. Lemmy!

MRS. L. [*Seraphically*] Thank yu. I'm a-feelin' very comfortable. 'Tes wonderful what a drop o' wine'll du for the stomach.

PRESS. A taxi-ride!

MRS. L. [*Placidly*] Ah! I know 'em. They'm very busy things.

LEMMY. Muvver shuns notority. [*Sotto voce to* THE PRESS] But you watch me! I'll rouse 'er.

He takes up his fiddle and sits on the window seat. Above the little houses on the opposite side of the street, the moon has risen in the dark blue sky, so that the cloud shaped like a beast seems leaping over it. LEMMY *plays the first notes of the Marseillaise. A black cat on the window-sill outside looks in, hunching its back.* LITTLE AIDA *barks at her.* MRS. LEMMY *struggles to her feet, sweeping the empty dish and spoon to the floor in the effort.*

The dish ran awy wiv the spoon! That's right, old lydy! [*He stops playing.*

MRS. L. [*Smiling, and moving her hands*] I like a bit o' music. It du that muve 'ee.

PRESS. Bravo, Mrs. Lemmy. Come on!

LEMMY. Come on, old dear! We'll be in time for the revolution yet.

MRS. L. 'Tes 'earin' the Old 'Undred again!

LEMMY. [*To* THE PRESS] She 'yn't been aht these two years. [*To his mother, who has put up her hands to her head*] Nao, never mind yer 'at. [*To* THE PRESS] She 'yn't got none! [*Aloud*] No West-End lydy wears anyfink at all in the evenin'!

MRS. L. 'Ow'm I lukin', Bob?

LEMMY. Fust-clawss; yer've got a colour fit to toast

by. We'll show 'em yer've got a kick in yer. [*He takes her arm*] Little Aida, ketch 'old o' the sensytions.

[*He indicates the trousers.*

THE PRESS *takes* MRS. LEMMY'S *other arm.*

MRS. L. [*With an excited little laugh*] Quite like a gell!

And, smiling between her son and THE PRESS, *she passes out;* LITTLE AIDA, *with a fling of her heels and a wave of the trousers, follows.*

CURTAIN

ACT III

An octagon ante-room off the hall at LORD WILLIAM DROMONDY'S. *A shining room lighted by gold candelabra, with gold-curtained pillars, through which the shining hall and a little of the grand stairway are visible. A small table with a gold-coloured cloth occupies the very centre of the room, which has a polished parquet floor and high white walls. Gold-coloured doors on the left. Opposite these doors a window with gold-coloured curtains looks out on Park Lane.* LADY WILLIAM *is standing restlessly between the double doors and the arch which leads to the hall.* JAMES *is stationary by the double doors, from behind which come sounds of speech and applause.*

POULDER. [*Entering from the hall*] His Grace the Duke of Exeter, my lady.

HIS GRACE *enters. He is old, and youthful, with a high colour and a short rough white beard.* LADY WILLIAM *advances to meet him.* POULDER *stands by.*

LADY W. Oh! Father, you *are* late.

HIS G. Awful crowd in the streets, Nell. They've got a coffin—couldn't get by.

LADY W. Coffin? Whose?

HIS G. The Government's I should think—no flowers, by request. I say, have I got to speak?

LADY W. Oh! no, dear.

HIS G. H'm! That's unlucky. I've got it here. [*He looks down his cuff*] Found something I said in 1914—just have done.

LADY W. Oh! If you've got it—James, ask Lord William to come to me for a moment. [JAMES *vanishes through the door. To* THE DUKE] Go in, Grand-dad; they'll be so awfully pleased to see you. I'll tell Bill.

HIS G. Where's Anne?

LADY W. In bed, of course.

HIS G. I got her this—rather nice?

He has taken from his breast-pocket one of those street toy-men that jump head over heels on your hand; he puts it through its paces.

LADY W. [*Much interested*] Oh! no, but how sweet! She'll simply love it.

POULDER. If I might suggest to Your Grace to take it in and operate it. It's sweated, Your Grace. They—er—make them in those places.

HIS G. By Jove! D'you know the price, Poulder?

POULDER. [*Interrogatively*] A penny, is it? Something paltry, Your Grace!

HIS G. Where's that woman who knows everything; Miss Munday?

LADY W. Oh! She'll be in there, somewhere.

HIS GRACE *moves on, and passes through the doors. The sound of applause is heard.*

POULDER. [*Discreetly*] Would you care to see the bomb, my lady?

LADY W. Of course—first quiet moment.

POULDER. I'll bring it up, and have a watch put on it here, my lady.

LORD WILLIAM *comes through the double doors, followed by* JAMES. POULDER *retires.*

LORD W. Can't you come, Nell?

LADY W. Oh! Bill, your Dad wants to speak.

LORD W. The deuce he does—that's bad.

LADY W. Yes, of course, but you *must* let him; he's found something he said in 1914.

LORD W. I knew it. That's what they'll say. Standing stock still, while hell's on the jump around us.

LADY W. Never mind that; it'll please him; and he's got a lovely little sweated toy that turns head over heels at one penny.

LORD W. H'm! Well, come on.

LADY W. No, I must wait for stragglers. There's sure to be an editor in a hurry.

POULDER. [*Announcing*] Mis-ter Gold-rum!

LADY W. [*Sotto voce*] And there he is! [*She advances to meet a thin, straggling man in eyeglasses, who is smiling absently*] How good of you!

MR. G. Thanks awfully. I just—er—and then I'm afraid I must—er— Things look very— Thanks—Thanks so much.

He straggles through the doors, and is enclosed by JAMES.

POULDER. Miss Mun-day.

LADY W. There! I thought she was in—— She really is the most unexpected woman! How do you do? How awfully sweet of you!

MISS M. [*An elderly female schoolboy*] How do you do? There's a spiffing crowd. I believe things are really going Bolshy. How do you do, Lord William? Have you got any of our people to show? I told one or two, in case—they do so simply love an outing.

JAMES. There are three old chips in the lobby, my Lord.

LORD W. What? Oh! I say! Bring them in at once. Why—they're the hub of the whole thing.

JAMES. [*Going*] Very good, my Lord.

LADY W. I *am* sorry. I'd no notion; and they're such dears always.

MISS M. I *must* tell you what one of them said to me. I'd told him not to use such bad language to his wife. "Don't you worry, Ma!" he said, "I expect you can do a bit of that yourself!"

LADY W. How awfully nice! It's *so* like them.

MISS M. Yes. They're wonderful.

LORD W. I say, why do we always call them *they?*

LADY W. [*Puzzled*] Well, why not?

LORD W. *They!*

MISS M. [*Struck*] Quite right, Lord William! *Quite* right! Another species. They! I must remember that. *They!* [*She passes on.*

LADY W. [*About to follow*] Well, I don't see; aren't they?

LORD W. Never mind, old girl; follow on. *They'll* come in with me.

MISS MUNDAY *and* LADY WILLIAM *pass through the double doors.*

POULDER. [*Announcing*] Some sweated workers, my Lord.

There enter a tall, thin, oldish woman ; a short, thin, very lame man, her husband ; and a stoutish middle-aged woman with a rolling eye and gait, all very poorly dressed, with lined and heated faces.

LORD W. [*Shaking hands*] How d'you do! Delighted to see you all. It's awfully good of you to have come.

LAME M. Mr. and Mrs. Tomson. We 'ad some trouble to find it. You see, I've never been in these parts. We 'ad to come in the oven; and the bus-bloke put us dahn wrong. Are you the proprietor?

LORD W. [*Modestly*] Yes, I—er——

LAME M. You've got a nice plyce. I says to the missis, I says: "'E's got a nice plyce 'ere," I says; "there's room to turn rahnd."

LORD W. Yes—shall we——?

LAME M. An' Mrs. Annaway she says: "Shouldn't mind livin' 'ere meself," she says; "but it must cost 'im a tidy penny," she says.

LORD W. It does—it does; much too tidy. Shall we——?

MRS. ANN. [*Rolling her eye*] I'm very pleased to

'ave come. I've often said to 'em: "Any time you want me," I've said, "I'd be pleased to come."

LORD W. Not so pleased as we are to see you.

MRS. ANN. I'm sure you're very kind.

JAMES. [*From the double doors, through which he has received a message*] Wanted for your speech, my Lord.

LORD W. Oh! God! Poulder, bring these ladies and gentleman in, and put them where everybody can —where they can see everybody, don't you know.

[*He goes out hurriedly through the double doors.*

LAME M. Is 'e a lord?

POULDER. He is. Follow me.

He moves towards the doors, the three workers follow.

MRS. ANN. [*Stopping before* JAMES] You 'yn't one, I suppose? [JAMES *stirs no muscle.*

POULDER. Now please. [*He opens the doors. The voice of* LORD WILLIAM *speaking is heard*] Pass in.

THE THREE WORKERS *pass in,* POULDER *and* JAMES *follow them. The doors are not closed, and through this aperture comes the voice of* LORD WILLIAM, *punctuated and supported by decorous applause.*

LITTLE ANNE *runs in, and listens at the window to the confused and distant murmurs of a crowd.*

VOICE OF LORD W. We propose to move for a further advance in the chain-making and—er—er—match-box industries. [*Applause.*

LITTLE ANNE *runs across to the door, to listen.*

[*On rising voice*] I would conclude with some general remarks. Ladies and gentlemen, the great natural, but—er—artificial expansion which trade experienced the first years after the war has—er—collapsed. These are hard times. We who are fortunate feel more than ever—er—responsible—[*He stammers, loses the thread of his thoughts.—Applause*]—er—responsible—[*The thread still eludes him*]—er——

L. ANNE. [*Poignantly*] Oh, Daddy!

LORD W. [*Desperately*] In fact—er—you know how—er—responsible we feel.

L. ANNE. Hooray! [*Applause.*

There float in through the windows the hoarse and distant sounds of the Marseillaise, as sung by London voices.

LORD W. There is a feeling in the air—that I for one should say deliberately was—er—a feeling in the air—er—a feeling in the air——

L. ANNE. [*Agonized*] Oh, Daddy! Stop!

[JAMES *enters, and closes the door behind him.*

JAMES. Look here! 'Ave I got to report you to Miss Stokes?

L. ANNE. No-o-o!

JAMES. Well, I'm goin' to.

L. ANNE. Oh, James, be a friend to me! I've seen nothing yet.

JAMES. No; but you've eaten a good bit, on the stairs. What price that Peach Melba?

L. ANNE. I can't go to bed till I've digested it—can I? There's such a lovely crowd in the street!

JAMES. Lovely? Ho!

L. ANNE. [*Wheedling*] James, you couldn't tell Miss Stokes! It isn't *in* you, is it?

JAMES. [*Grinning*] That's right.

L. ANNE. So—I'll just get under here. [*She gets under the table*] Do I show?

JAMES. [*Stooping*] Not 'arf!

[POULDER *enters from the hall.*

POULDER. What are you doin' there?

JAMES. [*Between him and the table—raising himself*] Thinkin'.

POULDER *purses his mouth to repress his feelings.*

POULDER. My orders are to fetch the bomb up here for Lady William to inspect. Take care no more writers stray in.

JAMES. How shall I know 'em?

POULDER. Well—either very bald or very hairy.

JAMES. Right-o! [*He goes.*

POULDER, *with his back to the table, busies himself with the set of his collar.*

POULDER. [*Addressing an imaginary audience—in a low but important voice*] The—ah—situation is seerious. It is up to us of the—ah—leisured classes——

The face of LITTLE ANNE *is poked out close to his legs, and tilts upwards in wonder towards the bow of his waistcoat.*

to—ah—keep the people down. The olla polloi are clamourin'——

MISS STOKES *appears from the hall, between the pillars.*

MISS S. Poulder!

POULDER. [*Making a* volte face *towards the table*] Miss?

MISS S. Where is Anne?

POULDER. [*Vexed at the disturbance of his speech*] Excuse me, Miss—to keep track of Miss Anne is fortunately no part of my dooties.

MISS S. She really is naughty.

POULDER. She is. If she was mine, I'd spank her.

The smiling face of LITTLE ANNE *becomes visible again close to his legs.*

MISS S. Not a nice word.

POULDER. No; but a pleasant haction. Miss Anne's the limit. In fact, Lord and Lady William are much too kind-'earted all round. Take these sweated workers; that class o' people are quite 'opeless. Treatin' them as your equals, shakin' 'ands with 'em, givin' 'em tea—it only puffs 'em out. Leave it to the Church, I say.

MISS S. The Church is too busy, Poulder.

POULDER. Ah! That "Purity an' Future o' the Race Campaign." I'll tell you what I think's the danger o' that, Miss. So much purity that there won't be a future race. [*Expanding*] Purity of 'eart's an excellent thing, no doubt, but there's a want of nature about it. Same with this Anti-Sweating. Unless you're anxious to come down, you must not put the lower classes up.

MISS S. I don't agree with you at all, Poulder.

POULDER. Ah! You want it both ways, Miss. I should imagine you're a Liberal.

MISS S. [*Horrified*] Oh, no! I certainly am not.

POULDER. Well, I judged from your takin' cocoa. Funny thing that, about cocoa—how it still runs through the Liberal Party! It's virtuous, I suppose. Wine, beer, tea, coffee—all of 'em vices. But cocoa—you might drink a gallon a day and annoy no one but yourself! There's a lot o' deep things in life, Miss!

MISS S. Quite so. But I must find Anne.

[*She recedes.*

POULDER. [*Suavely*] Well, I wish you every success; and I hope you'll spank her. This modern education—there's no fruitiness in it.

L. ANNE. [*From under the table*] Poulder, are you virtuous?

POULDER. [*Jumping*] Good Ged!

L. ANNE. D'you mind my asking? I promised James I would.

POULDER. Miss Anne, come out!

[*The four footmen appear in the hall,* HENRY *carrying the wine cooler.*

JAMES. Form fours—by your right—quick march!

[*They enter, marching down right of table.*

Right incline—Mark time! Left turn! 'Alt! 'Enry, set the bomb! Stand easy!

HENRY *places the wine cooler on the table and covers it with a blue embroidered Chinese mat, which has occupied the centre of the tablecloth.*

POULDER. Ah! You *will* 'ave your game! Thomas, take the door there! James, the 'all! Admit titles

an' bishops. No literary or Labour people. Charles and 'Enry, 'op it and 'ang about!

CHARLES *and* HENRY *go out, the other too move to their stations.*

POULDER *stands by the table looking at the covered bomb. The hoarse and distant sounds of the Marseillaise float in again from Park Lane.*

[*Moved by some deep feeling*] And this house an 'orspital in the war! I ask you—what was the good of all our sacrifices for the country? No town 'ouse for four seasons—rustygettin' in the shires, not a soul but two boys under me. Lord William at the front, Lady William at the back. And all for this! [*He points sadly at the cooler*] It comes of meddlin' on the Continent. I had my prognostications at the time. [*To* JAMES] You remember my sayin' to you just before you joined up: "Mark my words—we shall see eight per cent. for our money before this is over!"

JAMES. [*Sepulchrally*] I see the eight per cent., but not the money.

POULDER. Hark at that!

The sounds of the Marseillaise grow louder. He shakes his head.

I'd read the Riot Act. They'll be lootin' this house next!

JAMES. We'll put up a fight over your body: "Bartholomew Poulder, faithful unto death!" Have you insured your life?

POULDER. Against a revolution?

JAMES. Act o' God! Why not?

POULDER. It's not an act o' God.

JAMES. It is; and I sympathise with it.

POULDER. You—what?

JAMES. I do—only—hands off the gov'nor.

POULDER. Oh! Reelly! Well, that's something. I'm glad to see you stand behind *him*, at all events.

JAMES. *I* stand in front of 'im when the scrap begins!

POULDER. Do you insinuate that *my* heart's not in the right place?

JAMES. Well, look at it! It's been creepin' down ever since I knew you. Talk of your sacrifices in the war—they put you on your honour, and you got stout on it. Rations—not 'arf!

POULDER. [*Staring at him*] For independence, I've never seen your equal, James. You might be an Australian!

JAMES. [*Suavely*] Keep a civil tongue, or I'll throw you to the crowd! [*He comes forward to the table*] Shall I tell you why I favour the gov'nor? Because, with all his pomp, he's a gentleman, as much as I am. Never asks you to do what he wouldn't do himself. What's more, he never comes it over you. If you get drunk, or—well, you understand me, Poulder—he'll just say: "Yes, yes; I know, James!" till he makes you feel he's done it himself. [*Sinking his voice mysteriously*] I've had experience with him, in the war and out. Why! he didn't even hate the Huns, not as he ought. I tell you he's no Christian.

POULDER. Well, for irreverence——!

JAMES. [*Obstinately*] And he'll never be. He's got too soft a heart.

L. ANNE. [*Beneath the table—shrilly*] Hurrah!

POULDER. [*Jumping*] Come out, Miss Anne!

JAMES. Let 'er alone!

POULDER. In there, under the bomb?

JAMES. [*Contemptuously*] Silly ass! You should *take* 'em lying down!

POULDER. Look here, James! I can't go on in this revolutionary spirit; either you or I resign.

JAMES. Crisis in the Cabinet!

POULDER. I give you your marchin' orders.

JAMES. [*Ineffably*] What's that you give me?

POULDER. Thomas, remove James!

[THOMAS *grins.*

L. ANNE. [*Who, with open mouth, has crept out to see the fun*] Oh! *Do* remove James, Thomas!

POULDER. Go on, Thomas!

THOMAS *takes one step towards* JAMES, *who lays a hand on the Chinese mat covering the bomb.*

JAMES. [*Grimly*] If I lose control of meself——

L. ANNE. [*Clapping her hands*] Oh! James! Do lose control! Then I shall see it go off!

JAMES. [*To* POULDER] Well, I'll merely empty the pail over you!

POULDER. This is not becomin'!

[*He walks out into the hall.*

JAMES. Another strategic victory! What a Boche he'd have made. As you were, Tommy!

THOMAS *returns to the door. The sound of prolonged applause comes from within.*

That's a bishop.

L. ANNE. Why?

JAMES. By the way he's drawin'. It's the fine fightin' spirit in 'em. They were the backbone o' the war. I see there's a bit o' the old stuff left in you, Tommy.

L. ANNE. [*Scrutinizing the widely-grinning* THOMAS] Where? Is it in his mouth?

JAMES. You've still got a sense of your superiors. Didn't you notice how you moved to Poulder's orders, me boy; an' when he was gone, to mine?

L. ANNE. [*To* THOMAS] March!

[*The grinning* THOMAS *remains immovable.*

He doesn't, James!

JAMES. Look here, Miss Anne—your lights ought to be out before ten. Close in, Tommy!

[*He and* THOMAS *move towards her.*

L. ANNE. [*Dodging*] Oh, no! Oh, no! Look!

The footmen stop and turn. There between the pillars stands LITTLE AIDA *with the trousers, her face brilliant with surprise.*

JAMES. Good Lord! What's this?

Seeing LITTLE ANNE, LITTLE AIDA *approaches, fascinated, and the two children sniff at each other as it were like two little dogs walking round and round.*

L. ANNE. [*Suddenly*] My name's Anne; what's yours?

L. AIDA. Aida.

L. ANNE. Are you lost?

L. AIDA. Nao.

L. ANNE. Are those trousers?

L. AIDA. Yus.

L. ANNE. Whose?

L. AIDA. Mrs. Lemmy's.

L. ANNE. Does she wear them?

[LITTLE AIDA *smiles brilliantly.*

L. AIDA. Nao. She sews 'em.

L. ANNE. [*Touching the trousers*] They *are* hard. James's are much softer; aren't they, James? [JAMES *deigns no reply*] What shall we do? Would you like to see my bedroom?

L. AIDA. [*With a hop*] Aoh, yus!

JAMES. No.

L. ANNE. Why not?

JAMES. Have some sense of what's fittin'.

L. ANNE. Why isn't it fittin'? [*To* LITTLE AIDA] Do you like me?

L. AIDA. Yus-s.

L. ANNE. So do I. Come on!

[*She takes* LITTLE AIDA's *hand.*

JAMES. [*Between the pillars*] Tommy, ketch 'em!

[THOMAS *retains them by the skirts.*

L. ANNE. [*Feigning indifference*] All right, then! [*To* LITTLE AIDA] Have you ever seen a bomb?

L. AIDA. Nao.

L. ANNE. [*Going to the table and lifting a corner of the cover*] Look!

L. AIDA. [*Looking*] What's it for?

L. ANNE. To blow up this house.

L. AIDA. I daon't fink!

L. ANNE. Why not?

L. AIDA. It's a beautiful big 'ouse.

L. ANNE. That's why. Isn't it, James?

L. AIDA. You give the fing to me; I'll blow up our 'ouse—it's an ugly little 'ouse.

L. ANNE. [*Struck*] Let's all blow up our own; then we can start fair. Daddy would like that.

L. AIDA. Yus. [*Suddenly brilliant*] I've 'ad a ride in a taxi, an' we're goin' 'ome in it agyne!

L. ANNE. Were you sick?

LITTLE AIDA. [*Brilliant*] Nao.

L. ANNE. I was, when I first went in one, but I was quite young then. James, could you get her a Pêche Melba? There was *one*.

JAMES. No.

L. ANNE. Have you seen the revolution?

L. AIDA. Wot's that?

L. ANNE. It's made of people.

L. AIDA. I've seen the corfin, it's myde o' wood.

L. ANNE. Do you hate the rich?

L. AIDA. [*Ineffably*] Nao. I hates the poor.

L. ANNE. Why?

L. AIDA. 'Cos they 'yn't got nuffin'.

L. ANNE. I love the poor. They're such dears.

L. AIDA. [*Shaking her head with a broad smile*] Nao.

L. ANNE. Why not?

L. AIDA. I'd tyke and lose the lot, I would.

L. ANNE. Where?

L. AIDA. In the water.

L. ANNE. Like puppies?

L. AIDA. Yus.

L. ANNE. Why?

L. AIDA. Then I'd be shut of 'em.

L. ANNE. [*Puzzled*] Oh!

The voice of THE PRESS *is heard in the hall.*
"Where's the little girl?"

JAMES. That's you. Come 'ere!

He puts a hand behind LITTLE AIDA'S *back and propels her towards the hall.* THE PRESS *enters with old* MRS. LEMMY.

PRESS. Oh! Here she is, major domo. I'm going to take this old lady to the meeting; they want her on the platform. Look after our friend, Mr. Lemmy here; Lord William wants to see him presently.

L. ANNE. [*In an awed whisper*] James, it's the little blighter!

She dives again under the table. LEMMY *enters.*

LEMMY. 'Ere! 'Arf a mo'! Yer said yer'd drop me at my plyce. Well, I tell yer candid—this 'yn't my plyce!

PRESS. That's all right, Mr. Lemmy. [*He grins*] They'll make you wonderfully comfortable, won't you, major domo?

He passes on through the room, to the door, ushering old MRS. LEMMY *and* LITTLE AIDA.

POULDER *blocks* LEMMY'S *way, with* CHARLES *and* HENRY *behind him.*

POULDER. James, watch it; I'll report.

He moves away, following THE PRESS *through the door.* JAMES *between table and window.* THOMAS *has gone to the door.* HENRY *and* CHARLES *remain at the entrances to the hall.* LEMMY *looks dubiously around, his cockney assurance gradually returns.*

LEMMY. I think I knows the gas 'ere. This is where I came to-dy, 'yn't it? Excuse my hesitytion—these little 'ouses *is* so much the syme!

JAMES. [*Gloomily*] They are!

LEMMY. [*Looking at the four immovable footmen, till he concentrates on* JAMES] Ah! I 'ad a word wiv you, 'adn't I? You're the four conscientious ones wot's wyin' on your gov'nor's chest. 'Twas *you* I spoke to, wasn't it? [*His eyes travel over them again*] Ye're so monotonous. Well, ye're busy now, I see. I won't wyste yer time.

He turns towards the hall, but CHARLES *and* HENRY *bar the way in silence.*

[*Skidding a little, and regarding the four immovables once more*] I never see such pytient men? Compared wiv yer, mountains is restless!

He goes to the table. JAMES *watches him.* ANNE *barks from underneath.*

[*Skidding again*] Why! There's a dawg under there. [*Noting the grin on* THOMAS'S *face*] Glad it amooses yer. Yer want it, daon't yer, wiv a fyce like that?

Is this a ply wivaht words? 'Ave I got into the movies by mistyke? Turn aht, an' let's 'ave six penn'orth o' darkness.

L. ANNE. [*From beneath the table*] No, no! Not dark!

LEMMY. [*Musingly*] The dawg talks anywy. Come aht, Fido!

LITTLE ANNE *emerges, and regards him with burning curiosity.*

I sy: Is this the lytest fashion o' receivin' guests?

L. ANNE. Mother always wants people to feel at home. What shall we do? Would you like to hear the speeches? Thomas, open the door a little, do!

JAMES. 'Umour 'er a couple o' inches, Tommy!

THOMAS *draws the door back stealthily an inch or so.*

L. ANNE. [*After applying her eye—in a loud whisper*] There's the old lady. Daddy's looking at her trousers. Listen!

For MRS. LEMMY'S *voice is floating faintly through: "I putt in the buttonholes, I stretches the flies; I 'ems the bottoms; I lines the crutch; I putt on this bindin'; I sews on the buttons; I presses the seams — Tuppence three farthin's the pair.*

LEMMY. [*In a hoarse whisper*] That's it, old lydy: give it 'em!

L. ANNE. Listen!

VOICE OF LORD W. We are indebted to our friends the Press for giving us the pleasure—er—pleasure of hearing from her own lips—the pleasure——

L. ANNE. Oh! Daddy!

[THOMAS *abruptly closes the doors.*

LEMMY. [*To* ANNE] Now yer've done it. See wot comes o' bein' impytient. We was just gettin' to the marrer.

L. ANNE. What can we do for you now?

LEMMY. [*Pointing to* ANNE, *and addressing* JAMES] Wot is this one, anywy?

JAMES. [*Sepulchrally*] Daughter o' the house.

LEMMY. Is she insured agynst 'er own curiosity?

L. ANNE. Why?

LEMMY. As I daon't believe in a life beyond the gryve, I might be tempted to send yer there.

L. ANNE. What is the gryve?

LEMMY. Where little gells goes to.

L. ANNE. Oh, *when?*

LEMMY. [*Pretending to look at a watch, which is not there*] Well, I dunno if I've got time to finish yer this minute. Sy to-morrer at 'arf past.

L. ANNE. Half past what?

LEMMY. [*Despairingly*] 'Arf past wot!

[*The sound of applause is heard.*

JAMES. That's 'is Grace. 'E's gettin' wickets, too.

[POULDER *entering from the door.*

POULDER. Lord William is slippin' in.

He makes a cabalistic sign with his head. JAMES *crosses to the door.* LEMMY *looks dubiously at* POULDER.

LEMMY. [*Suddenly—as to himself*] Wot oh! I am the portly one!

POULDER. [*Severely*] Any such allusion aggeravates your offence.

LEMMY. Oh, ah! Look 'ere, it was a corked bottle. Now, tyke care, tyke care, 'aughty! Daon't curl yer lip! I shall myke a clean breast o' my betryal when the time comes!

There is a slight movement of the door. ANNE *makes a dive towards the table but is arrested by* POULDER *grasping her waistband.* LORD WILLIAM *slips in, followed by* THE PRESS, *on whom* JAMES *and* THOMAS *close the door too soon.*

HALF OF THE PRESS. [*Indignantly*] Look out!

JAMES. Do you want him in or out, me Lord?

LEMMY. I sy, you've divided the Press; 'e was unanimous.

[*The* FOOTMEN *let* THE PRESS *through.*

LORD W. [*To* THE PRESS] I'm so sorry.

LEMMY. Would yer like me to see to 'is gas?

LORD W. So you're my friend of the cellars?

LEMMY. [*Uneasy*] I daon't deny it.

[POULDER *begins removing* LITTLE ANNE.

L. ANNE. Let me stay, Daddy; I haven't seen anything yet! If I go, I shall only have to come down again when they loot the house. Listen!

The hoarse strains of the Marseillaise are again heard from the distance.

LORD W. [*Blandly*] Take her up, Poulder!

L. ANNE. Well, I'm coming down again—and next time I shan't have any clothes on, you know.

They vanish between the pillars. LORD WILLIAM *makes a sign of dismissal. The* FOOTMEN *file out.*

LEMMY. [*Admiringly*] Luv'ly pyces!

LORD W. [*Pleasantly*] Now then; let's have our talk, Mr. ——

LEMMY. Lemmy.

PRESS. [*Who has slipped his note-book out*] "Bombed and Bomber face to face——"

LEMMY. [*Uneasy*] I didn't come 'ere agyne on me own, yer know. The Press betryed me.

LORD W. Is that old lady your mother?

LEMMY. The syme. I tell yer stryte, it was for 'er I took that old bottle o' port. It *was* orful old.

LORD W. Ah! Port? Probably the '63. Hope you both enjoyed it.

LEMMY. So far—yus. Muvver'll suffer a bit tomorrer, I expect.

LORD W. I should like to do something for your mother, if you'll allow me.

LEMMY. Oh! I'll allow yer. But I dunno wot she'll sy.

LORD W. I can see she's a fine independent old lady! But suppose you were to pay her ten bob a week, and keep my name out of it?

LEMMY. Well, that's one wy o' *you* doin' somefink, 'yn't it?

LORD W. I giving you the money, of course.

PRESS. [*Writing*] "Lord William, with kingly generosity——"

LEMMY. [*Drawing attention to* THE PRESS *with his thumb*] I sy—I daon't mind, meself—if you daon't——

LORD W. He won't write anything to annoy me.

PRESS. This is the big thing, Lord William; it'll get the public bang in the throat.

LEMMY. [*Confidentially*] Bit dyngerous, 'yn't it?—trustin' the Press? Their right 'ands never knows wot their left 'ands is writin'. [*To* THE PRESS] 'Yn't that true, speakin' as a man?

PRESS. Mr. Lemmy, even the Press is capable of gratitude.

LEMMY. Is it? I should ha' thought it was too important for a little thing like that. [*To* LORD WILLIAM] But ye're quite right; we couldn't do wivaht the Press—there wouldn't be no distress, no corfin, no revolution—'cos nobody'd know nuffin' abaht it. Why! There wouldn't be no life at all on Earf in these dyes, wivaht the Press! It's them wot says: "Let there be Light—an' there is Light."

LORD W. Umm! That's rather a new thought to me. [*Writes on his cuff.*]

LEMMY. But abaht Muvver, I'll tell yer 'ow we can arrynge. You send 'er the ten bob a week wivaht syin' anyfink, an' she'll fink it comes from Gawd or the Gover'ment—yer cawn't tell one from t'other in Befnal Green.

LORD W. All right; we'll do that.

LEMMY. Will yer reely? I'd like to shyke yer 'and.

LORD WILLIAM *puts out his hand, which* LEMMY *grasps.*

PRESS. [*Writing*] "The heart-beat of humanity was in that grasp between the son of toil and the son of leisure."

LEMMY. [*Already ashamed of his emotion*] 'Ere, 'arf a mo'! Which is which? Daon't forget I'm aht o' work; Lord William, if that's 'is nyme, is workin' 'ard at 'is Anti-Sweats! Wish I could get a job like vat—jist suit me!

LORD W. That hits hard, Mr. Lemmy!

LEMMY. Daon't worry! Yer cawn't 'elp bein' born in the purple!

LORD W. Ah! Tell me, what would you do in my place?

LEMMY. Why—as the nobleman said in 'is well-known wy: "Sit in me Club winder an' watch it ryne on the dam people!" That's if I was a average nobleman! If I was a bit more noble, I might be tempted to come the kind-'earted on twenty thou' a year. Some prefers yachts, or ryce 'orses. But philanthrópy on the 'ole is syfer, in these dyes.

LORD W. So you think one takes to it as a sort of insurance, Mr. Lemmy? Is that quite fair?

LEMMY. Well, we've all got a weakness towards bein' kind, somewhere abaht us. But the moment wealf comes in, we 'yn't wot I call single-'earted. If yer went into the foundytions of your wealf—would yer feel like 'avin' any? It all comes from uvver people's 'ard, unpleasant lybour—it's all built on

Muvver as yer might sy. An' if yer daon't get rid o' some of it in bein' kind—yer daon't feel syfe nor comfy.

LORD W. [*Twisting his moustache*] Your philosophy is very pessimistic.

LEMMY. Well, *I* calls meself an optimist; I sees the worst of everyfink. Never disappynted, can afford to 'ave me smile under the blackest sky. When deaf is squeezin' of me windpipe, I shall 'ave a laugh in it! Fact is, if yer've 'ad to do wiv gas an' water pipes, yer can fyce anyfing. [*The distant Marseillaise blares up*] 'Ark at the revolution!

LORD W. [*Rather desperately*] I know—hunger and all the rest of it! And here am I, a rich man, and don't know what the deuce to do.

LEMMY. Well, I'll tell yer. Throw yer cellars open, an' while the populyce is gettin' drunk, sell all yer 'ave an' go an' live in Ireland; they've got the millennium chronic over there.

LORD WILLIAM *utters a short, vexed laugh, and begins to walk about.*

That's speakin' as a practical man. Speakin' as a synt—"Bruvvers, all I 'ave is yours. To-morrer I'm goin' dahn to the Lybour Exchynge to git put on the wytin' list, syme as you!"

LORD W. But, d—— it, man, there we should be, all together! Would that help?

LEMMY. Nao; but it'd syve a lot o' blood.

LORD WILLIAM *stops abruptly, and looks first at* LEMMY, *then at the cooler, still covered with the Chinese mat.*

Yer thought the Englishman could be taught to shed

blood wiv syfety. Not 'im! Once yer git 'im into an 'abit, yer cawn't git 'im out of it agyne. 'E'll go on sheddin' blood mechanical—Conservative by nyture. An' 'e won't myke nuffin' o' yours. Not even the Press wiv 'is 'oneyed words'll sty 'is 'and.

LORD W. And what do you suggest we could have done, to avoid trouble?

LEMMY. [*Warming to his theme*] I'll tell yer. If all you wealfy nobs wiv kepitel 'ad come it kind from the start after the war yer'd never 'a been 'earin' the Marseillaisy naow. Lord! 'Ow you did talk abaht Unity and a noo spirit in the Country. Noo spirit! Why, soon as ever there was no dynger from outside, yer stawted to myke it inside, wiv an iron 'and. Naow, *you've* been in the war an' it's given yer a feelin' 'eart; but most of the nobs wiv kepitel was too old or too important to fight. *They* weren't born agyne. So naow that bad times is come, we're 'owlin' for their blood.

LORD W. I quite agree; I quite agree. I've often said much the same thing.

LEMMY. Voice cryin' in the wilderness—I daon't sy *we* was yngels—there was faults on bofe sides. [*He looks at* THE PRESS] The Press could ha' helped yer a lot. Shall I tell yer wot the Press did? "It's vital," said the Press, "that the country should be united, or it will never recover." Nao strikes, nao 'uman nature, nao nuffink. Kepitel an' Lybour like the Siamese twins. And, fust dispute that come along, the Press orfs wiv its coat an' goes at it bald-'eaded.

An' wot abaht since? Sich a riot o' nymes called, in Press and Pawlyement—Unpatriotic an' outrygeous demands o' lybour. Blood-suckin' tyranny o' Kepitel; thieves an' dawgs an' 'owlin Jackybines—gents throwin' books at each other; all the resources of edjucytion exhausted! If I'd been Prime Minister I'd 'ave 'ad the Press's gas cut 'orf at the meter. Puffect liberty, of course, nao Censorship; just sy wot yer like—an' never be 'eard of no more.

Turning suddenly to THE PRESS, *who has been scribbling in pace with this harangue, and now has developed a touch of writer's cramp.*

Why! 'Is 'and's out o' breath! Fink o' vet!

LORD W. Great tribute to your eloquence, Mr. Lemmy!

A sudden stir of applause and scraping of chairs is heard; the meeting is evidently breaking up. LADY WILLIAM *comes in, followed by* MRS. LEMMY *with her trousers, and* LITTLE AIDA. LEMMY *stares fixedly at this sudden radiant apparition. His gaze becomes as that of a rabbit regarding a snake. And suddenly he puts up his hand and wipes his brow.*

LADY WILLIAM, *going to the table, lifts one end of the Chinese mat, and looks at* LEMMY. *Then she turns to* LORD WILLIAM.

LADY W. Bill!

LEMMY. [*To his mother—in a hoarse whisper*] She calls 'im Bill. 'Ow! 'Yn't she IT?

LADY W. [*Apart*] Have you spoken to him?

[LORD WILLIAM *shakes his head.*

Not? What have you been saying, then?

LORD W. Nothing, he's talked all the time.

LADY W. [*Very low*] What a little caution!

LORD W. Steady, old girl! He's got his eye on you!

LADY WILLIAM *looks at* LEMMY, *whose eyes are still fixed on her.*

LADY W. [*With resolution*] Well, *I'm* going to tackle him.

She moves towards LEMMY, *who again wipes his brow, and wrings out his hand.*

MRS. LEMMY. Don't 'ee du that, Bob. Yu must forgive 'im, Ma'am; it's 'is admiration. 'E was always one for the ladies, and he'm not used to seein' so much of 'em.

LADY W. Don't you think you owe us an explanation?

MRS. L. Speak up, Bob.

[*But* LEMMY *only shifts his feet.*

My gudeness! 'E've a-lost 'is tongue. I never knu that 'appen to 'e before.

LORD W. [*Trying to break the embarrassment*] No ill-feeling, you know, Lemmy.

[*But* LEMMY *still only rolls his eyes.*

LADY W. Don't you think it was rather—inconsiderate of you?

LEMMY. Muvver, tyke me aht, I'm feelin' fynte!

Spurts of the Marseillaise and the mutter of the crowd have been coming nearer; and suddenly a knocking is heard. POULDER *and* JAMES *appear between the pillars.*

POULDER. The populace, me Lord!

LADY W. What!

LORD W. Where've you put 'em, Poulder?

POULDER. They've put theirselves in the portico, me Lord.

LORD W. [*Suddenly wiping his brow*] Phew! I say, this is awful, Nell! Two speeches in one evening. Nothing else for it, I suppose. Open the window, Poulder!

POULDER. [*Crossing to the window*] We are prepared for any sacrifice, me Lord. [*He opens the window.*

PRESS. [*Writing furiously*] "Lady William stood like a statue at bay."

LORD W. Got one of those lozenges on you, Nell?

But LADY WILLIAM *has almost nothing on her.*

LEMMY. [*Producing a paper from his pocket*] 'Ave one o' my gum drops?

[*He passes it to* LORD WILLIAM.

LORD W. [*Unable to refuse, takes a large flat gum drop from the paper, and looks at it in embarrassment.*] Ah! thanks! Thanks awfully!

LEMMY *turns to* LITTLE AIDA, *and puts a gum drop in her mouth. A burst of murmurs from the crowd.*

JAMES. [*Towering above the wine cooler*] If they get saucy, me Lord, I can always give 'em their own back.

LORD W. Steady, James; steady!

He puts the gum drop absently in his mouth, and turns up to the open window.

VOICE. [*Outside*] 'Ere they are—the bally plutocrats. [*Voices in chorus: "Bread! Bread!"*

LORD W. Poulder, go and tell the chef to send out anything there is in the house—nicely, as if it came from nowhere in particular.

POULDER. Very good, me Lord. [*Sotto voce*] Any wine? If I might suggest—German—'ock?

LORD W. What you like.

POULDER Very good, me Lord. [*He goes.*

LORD W. I say, dash it, Nell, my teeth are stuck!

[*He works his finger in his mouth.*

LADY W. Take it out, darling.

LORD W. [*Taking out the gum drop and looking at it*] What the deuce did I put it in for?

PRESS. [*Writing*] "With inimitable coolness Lord William prepared to address the crowd."

[*Voices in chorus: "Bread! Bread!"*

LORD W. Stand by to prompt, old girl. Now for it. This ghastly gum drop!

LADY WILLIAM *takes it from his agitated hand, and flips it through the window.*

VOICE. Dahn with the aristo—— [*Chokes.*

LADY W. Oh! Bill—*oh!* It's gone into a mouth!

LORD W. Good God!

VOICE. Wot's this? Throwin' things? Mind aht, or we'll smash yer winders!

As the voices in chorus chant: "Bread! Bread!" LITTLE ANNE, *night-gowned, darts in from the hall. She is followed by* MISS STOKES. *They stand listening.*

LORD W. [*To the Crowd*] My friends, you've come to the wrong shop. There's nobody in London more sympathetic with you. [*The crowd laughs hoarsely.* [*Whispering*] Look out, old girl; they can see your shoulders. [LADY WILLIAM *moves back a step.* If I were a speaker, I could make you feel——

VOICE. Look at his white weskit! Blood-suckers—fattened on the people!

[JAMES *dives his hand at the wine cooler.*

LORD W. I've always said the Government ought to take immediate steps——

VOICE. To shoot us dahn.

LORD W. Not a bit. To relieve the—er——

LADY W. [*Prompting*] Distress.

LORD W. Distress, and ensure—er—ensure——

LADY W. [*Prompting*] Quiet.

LORD W. [*To her*] No, no. To ensure—ensure——

L. ANNE. [*Agonized*] Oh, Daddy!

VOICE. 'E wants to syve 'is dirty great 'ouse.

LORD W. [*Roused*] D—— if I do!

[*Rude and hoarse laughter from the crowd.*

JAMES. [*With fury*] Me Lord, let me blow 'em to glory!

He raises the cooler and advances towards the window.

LORD W. [*Turning sharply on him*] Drop it, James; drop it!

PRESS. [*Jumping*] No, no; don't drop it!

JAMES *retires crestfallen to the table, where he replaces the cooler.*

LORD W. [*Catching hold of his bit*] Look here, I must have fought alongside some of you fellows in the war. Weren't we jolly well like brothers?

A VOICE. Not so much bloomin' "Kamerad"; hand over yer 'ouse.

LORD W. I was born with this beastly great house, and money, and goodness knows what other entanglements—a wife and family——

VOICE. Born with a wife and family!

[*Jeers and laughter.*

LORD W. I feel we're all in the same boat, and I want to pull my weight. If you can show me the way, I'll take it fast enough.

A DEEP VOICE. Step dahn then, an' we'll step up.

ANOTHER VOICE. 'Ear, 'Ear!

[*A fierce little cheer.*

LORD W. [*To* LADY WILLIAM—*in despair*] By George! I can't get in anywhere!

LADY W. [*Calmly*] Then shut the window, Bill.

LEMMY. [*Who has been moving towards them slowly*] Lemme sy a word to 'em.

All stare at him. LEMMY *approaches the window, followed by* LITTLE AIDA. POULDER *re-enters with the three other footmen.*

[*At the window*] Cheerio! Cockies!

[*The silence of surprise falls on the crowd.*

I'm one of yer. Gas an' water I am. Got more grievances an' out of employment than any of yer. I want to see their blood flow, syme as you.

PRESS. [*Writing*] "Born orator—ready cockney wit —saves situation."

LEMMY. Wot I sy is: Dahn wiv the country, dahn wiv everyfing. Begin agyne from the foundytions. [*Nodding his head back at the room*] But we've got to keep one or two o' these 'ere under glawss, to show our future generytions. An' this one is 'armless. His pipes is sahnd, 'is 'eart is good; 'is 'ead is *not* strong. 'Is 'ouse will myke a charmin' palace o' varieties where our children can come an' see 'ow they did it in the good old dyes. Yer never see sich waxworks as 'is butler and 'is four conscientious khaki footmen. Why —wot d'yer think 'e 'as 'em for—fear they might be out-o'-works like you an' me. Nao! Keep this one; 'e's a Flower. 'Arf a mo'! I'll show yer my Muvver. Come 'ere, old lydy; and bring yer trahsers. [MRS. LEMMY *comes forward to the window*] Tell abaht yer speech to the meetin'.

MRS. LEMMY. [*Bridling*] Oh dear! Well, I cam' in with me trousers, an' they putt me up on the pedestory

at once, so I tole 'em. [*Holding up the trousers*] "I putt in the button'oles, I stretches the flies; I lines the crutch; I putt on this bindin', I presses the seams—Tuppence three farthin's a pair."

[*A groan from the crowd.*

LEMMY. [*Showing her off*] Seventy-seven! Wot's 'er income? Twelve bob a week; seven from the Gover'ment, an' five from the sweat of 'er brow. Look at 'er! 'Yn't she a tight old dear to keep it goin'! No workus for 'er, nao fear! The gryve rather!

Murmurs from the crowd, at whom MRS. LEMMY *is blandly smiling.*

You cawn't git below 'er—impossible! She's the foundytions of the country—an' rocky 'yn't the word for 'em. Worked 'ard all 'er life, brought up a family and buried 'em on it. Twelve bob a week, an' seven when 'er fingers goes, which is very near. Well, naow, this torf 'ere comes to me an' says: "I'd like to do somefin' for yer muvver. 'Ow's ten bob a week?" 'e says. Naobody arst 'im—quite on 'is own. That's the sort 'e is. [*Sinking his voice confidentially*] Sorft. You bring yer muvvers 'ere, 'e'll do the syme for them. I giv yer the 'int.

VOICE. [*From the crowd*] What's 'is nyme?

LEMMY. They calls 'im Bill.

VOICE. Bill what?

L. ANNE. Dromondy.

LADY W. Anne!

LEMMY. Dromedary 'is nyme is.

VOICE. [*From the crowd*] Three cheers for Bill Dromedary.

LEMMY. I sy, there's veal an' 'am, an' pork wine at the back for them as wants it; I 'eard the word passed. An' look 'ere, if yer want a flag for the revolution, tyke muvver's trahsers an' tie 'em to the corfin. Yer cawn't 'ave no more inspirin' banner. Ketch! [*He throws the trousers out*] Give Bill a double-barrel fust, to show there's no ill-feelin'. 'Ip, 'ip!

The crowd cheers, then slowly passes away, singing its hoarse version of the Marseillaise, till all that is heard is a faint murmuring and a distant barrel-organ playing the same tune.

PRESS. [*Writing*] "And far up in the clear summer air the larks were singing."

LORD W. [*Passing his hand over his hair, and blinking his eyes*] James! Ready?

JAMES. Me Lord!

L. ANNE. Daddy!

LADY W. [*Taking his arm*] Bill! It's all right, old man—all right!

LORD W. [*Blinking*] Those infernal larks! Thought we were on the Somme again! Ah! Mr. Lemmy, [*Still rather dreamy*] no end obliged to you; you're so decent. Now, why did you want to blow us up before dinner?

LEMMY. Blow yer up? [*Passing his hand over his hair in travesty*] "Is it a dream? Then wykin' would be pyne."

MRS. LEMMY. Bo-ob! Not so saucy, my boy!

LEMMY. Blow yer up? Wot abaht it?

LADY W. [*Indicating the bomb*] This, Mr. Lemmy!

LEMMY *looks at it, and his eyes roll and goggle.*

LORD W. Come, all's forgiven! But why did you?

LEMMY. Orl right! I'm goin' to tyke it awy; it'd a-been a bit ork'ard for me. I'll want it to-morrer.

LORD W. What! To leave somewhere else?

LEMMY. Yus, of course!

LORD W. No, no; dash it! Tell us—what's it filled with?

LEMMY. Filled wiv? Nuffin'. Wot did yer expect? Toof-pahder? It's got a bit o' my lead soldered on to it. That's why it's 'eavy!

LORD W. But what *is* it?

LEMMY. Wot is it? [*His eyes are fearfully fixed on* LADY WILLIAM] I fought everybody knew 'em.

LADY W. Mr. Lemmy, you must clear this up, please.

LEMMY. [*To* LORD WILLIAM, *with his eyes still fixed on* LADY WILLIAM—*mysteriously*] Wiv lydies present? 'Adn't I better tell the Press?

LORD W. All right; tell someone—anyone!

LEMMY *goes down to* THE PRESS, *who is reading over his last note. Everyone watches and listens with the utmost discretion, while he whispers into the ear of* THE PRESS, *who shakes his head violently.*

PRESS. No, no; it's too horrible. It destroys my whole——

LEMMY. Well, I tell yer it is.

[*Whispers again violently.*

PRESS. No, no; I can't have it. All my article! All my article! It can't be—no!

LEMMY. I never see sich an obstinate thick-head! Yer 'yn't worvy of yer tryde.

He whispers still more violently and makes cabalistic signs.

LADY WILLIAM *lifts the bomb from the cooler into the sight of all.* LORD WILLIAM, *seeing it for the first time in full light, bends double in silent laughter, and whispers to his wife.* LADY WILLIAM *drops the bomb and gives way too. Hearing the sound,* LEMMY *turns, and his goggling eyes pass them all in review.* LORD *and* LADY WILLIAM *in fits of laughter,* LITTLE ANNE *stamping her feet, for* MISS STOKES, *red, but composed, has her hands placed firmly over her pupil's eyes and ears;* LITTLE AIDA *smiling brilliantly,* MRS. LEMMY *blandly in sympathy, neither knowing why; the* FOUR FOOTMEN *in a row, smothering little explosions.* POULDER, *extremely grave and red,* THE PRESS *perfectly haggard, gnawing at his nails.*

LEMMY. [*Turning to* THE PRESS] Blimy! It amooses 'em, all but the genteel ones. Cheer oh! Press! Yer can always myke somefin' out o' nuffin'? It's not the fust thing as 'as existed in yer imaginytion only.

PRESS. No, d—— it; I'll keep it a bomb!

LEMMY. [*Soothingly*] Ah! Keep the sensytion. Wot's the troof compared wiv that? Come on, Muvver! Come on, Little Aida! Time we was goin' dahn to 'Earf!

He goes up to the table, and still skidding a little at LADY WILLIAM, *takes the late bomb from the cooler, placing it under his arm.*

MRS. LEMMY. Gude naight, sir; gude naight, ma'am; thank yu for my cup o' tea, an' all yure kindness.

She shakes hands with LORD *and* LADY WILLIAM, *drops the curtsey of her youth before* MR. POULDER, *and goes out followed by* LITTLE AIDA, *who is looking back at* LITTLE ANNE.

LEMMY. [*Turning suddenly*] Aoh! An' jist one fing! Next time yer build an 'ouse, daon't forget—it's the foundytions as bears the wyte.

With a wink that gives way to a last fascinated look at LADY WILLIAM, *he passes out. All gaze after them, except* THE PRESS, *who is tragically consulting his spiflicated notes.*

L. ANNE. [*Breaking away from* MISS STOKES *and rushing forward*] Oh! Mum! what *was* it?

CURTAIN

THE SKIN GAME

(A TRAGI-COMEDY)

"Who touches pitch shall be defiled"

CHARACTERS

Hillcrist	A Country Gentleman
Amy	His Wife
Jill	His Daughter
Dawker	His Agent
Hornblower	A man newly-rich
Charles	His Elder Son
Chloe	Wife to Charles
Rolf	His Younger Son
Fellows	Hillcrist's Butler
Anna	Chloe's Maid
The Jackmans	Man and Wife
An Auctioneer	
A Solicitor	
Two Strangers	

ACT I. Hillcrist's *Study.*

ACT II.

SCENE I. A month later. An Auction Room.

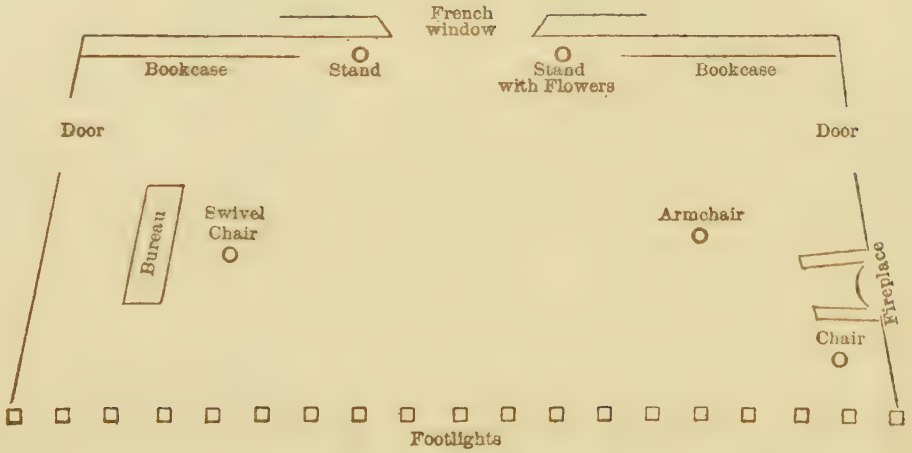
SCENE II. The same evening. Chloe's *Boudoir.*

ACT III.

SCENE I. The following day. Hillcrist's *Study. Morning.*

SCENE II. The Same. Evening.

ACT I


French window
Bookcase
Stand
Stand with Flowers
Bookcase
Door
Door
Bureau
Swivel Chair
Armchair
Fireplace
Chair
Footlights

ACT I

HILLCRIST'S *study. A pleasant room, with books in calf bindings, and signs that the* HILLCRISTS *have travelled, such as a large photograph of the Taj Mahal, of Table Mountain, and the Pyramids of Egypt. A large bureau [stage Right], devoted to the business of a country estate. Two foxes' masks. Flowers in bowls. Deep armchairs. A large French window open [at Back], with a lovely view of a slight rise of fields and trees in August sunlight. A fine stone fireplace [stage Left]. A door [Left]. A door opposite [Right]. General colour effect—stone, and cigar-leaf brown, with spots of bright colour.*

[HILLCRIST *sits in a swivel chair at the bureau, busy with papers. He has gout, and his left foot is encased accordingly. He is a thin, dried-up man of about fifty-five, with a rather refined, rather kindly, and rather cranky countenance. Close to him stands his very upstanding nineteen-year-old daughter* JILL, *with clubbed hair round a pretty, manly face.*]

JILL. You know, Dodo, it's all pretty good rot in these days.

HILLCRIST. Cads are cads, Jill, even in these days.

JILL. What is a cad?

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HILLCRIST. A self-assertive fellow, without a sense of other people.

JILL. Well, Old Hornblower I'll give you.

HILLCRIST. I wouldn't take him.

JILL. Well, you've got him. Now, Charlie—Chearlie—I say—the importance of not being Charlie——

HILLCRIST. Good heavens! do you know their Christian names?

JILL. My dear father, they've been here seven years.

HILLCRIST. In old days we only knew their Christian names from their tombstones.

JILL. Charlie Hornblower isn't really half a bad sport.

HILLCRIST. About a quarter of a bad sport—I've always thought out hunting.

JILL. [*Pulling his hair*] Now, his wife—Chloe——

HILLCRIST. [*Whimsical*] Gad! your mother'd have a fit if she knew you called her Chloe.

JILL. It's a ripping name.

HILLCRIST. Chloe! H'm! I had a spaniel once——

JILL. Dodo, you're narrow. Buck up, old darling, it won't do. Chloe has seen life, I'm pretty sure; *that's* attractive, anyway. No, mother's not in the room; don't turn your uneasy eyes.

HILLCRIST. Really, my dear, you are getting——

JILL. The limit. Now, Rolf——

HILLCRIST. What's Rolf? Another dog?

JILL. Rolf Hornblower's a topper; he really is a nice boy.

HILLCRIST. [*With a sharp look*] Oh! He's a nice boy?

JILL. Yes, darling. You know what a nice boy is, don't you?

HILLCRIST. Not in these days.

JILL. Well, I'll tell you. In the first place, he's not amorous——

HILLCRIST. What! Well, that's some comfort.

JILL. Just a jolly good companion.

HILLCRIST. To whom?

JILL. Well, to anyone—me.

HILLCRIST. Where?

JILL. Anywhere. You don't suppose I confine myself to the home paddocks, do you? I'm naturally rangey, Father.

HILLCRIST. [*Ironically*] You don't say so!

JILL. In the second place, he doesn't like discipline.

HILLCRIST. Jupiter! He does seem attractive.

JILL. In the third place, he bars his father.

HILLCRIST. Is that essential to nice *girls* too?

JILL. [*With a twirl of his hair*] Fish not! Fourthly, he's got ideas.

HILLCRIST. I knew it!

JILL. For instance, he thinks—as I do——

HILLCRIST. Ah! *Good* ideas.

JILL. [*Pulling gently*] Careful! He thinks old people run the show too much. He says they oughtn't to, because they're so damtouchy. Are you damtouchy, darling?

HILLCRIST. Well, I'm——! I don't know about touchy.

JILL. He says there'll be no world fit to live in till we get rid of the old. We must make them climb a tall tree, and shake them off it.

HILLCRIST. [*Drily*] Oh! he says that!

JILL. Otherwise, with the way they stand on each other's rights, they'll spoil the garden for the young.

HILLCRIST. Does his father agree?

JILL. Oh! Rolf doesn't talk to *him*, his mouth's too large. Have you ever seen it, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Of course.

JILL. It's considerable, isn't it? Now yours is—reticent, darling. [*Rumpling his hair.*]

HILLCRIST. It won't be in a minute. Do you realise that I've got gout?

JILL. Poor ducky! How long have we been here, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Since Elizabeth, anyway.

JILL. [*Looking at his foot*] It has its drawbacks. D'you think Hornblower had a father? I believe he was spontaneous. But, Dodo, why all this—this *attitude* to the Hornblowers?

She purses her lips and makes a gesture as of pushing persons away.

HILLCRIST. Because they're pushing.

JILL. That's only because we *are*, as mother would say, and they're *not*—yet. But why not let them be?

HILLCRIST. You can't.

JILL. *Why?*

HILLCRIST. It takes generations to learn to live and let live, Jill. People like that take an ell when you give them an inch.

JILL. But if you gave them the ell, they wouldn't want the inch. Why should it all be such a skin game?

HILLCRIST. Skin game? Where *do* you get your lingo?

JILL. Keep to the point, Dodo.

HILLCRIST. Well, Jill, all life's a struggle between people at different stages of development, in different positions, with different amounts of social influence and property. And the only thing is to have rules of the game and keep them. New people like the Hornblowers haven't learnt those rules; *their* only rule is to get all they can.

JILL. Darling, don't prose. They're not half as bad as you think.

HILLCRIST. Well, when I sold Hornblower Longmeadow and the cottages, I certainly found him all right. All the same, he's got the cloven hoof. [*Warming up*] His influence in Deepwater is thoroughly bad; those potteries of his are demoralising—the whole atmosphere of the place is changing. It was a thousand pities he ever came here and discovered that clay. He's brought in the modern cutthroat spirit.

JILL. Cut *our* throat spirit, you mean. What's your definition of a gentleman, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. [*Uneasily*] Can't describe—only feel it.

JILL. Oh! Try!

HILLCRIST. Well—er—I suppose you might say—a

man who keeps his form and doesn't let life scupper him out of his standards.

JILL. But suppose his standards are low?

HILLCRIST. [*With some earnestness*] I assume, of course, that he's honest and tolerant, gentle to the weak, and not self-seeking.

JILL. Ah! self-seeking? But aren't we all, Dodo? *I* am.

HILLCRIST. [*With a smile*] You!

JILL. [*Scornfully*] Oh! yes—too young to know.

HILLCRIST. Nobody knows till they're under pretty heavy fire, Jill.

JILL. Except, of course, mother.

HILLCRIST. How do you mean—mother?

JILL. Mother reminds me of England according to herself—always right whatever she does.

HILLCRIST. Ye–es. Your mother *is* perhaps—the perfect woman——

JILL. That's what I was saying. Now, no one could call *you* perfect, Dodo. Besides, you've got gout.

HILLCRIST. Yes; and I want Fellows. Ring that bell.

JILL. [*Crossing to the bell*] Shall I tell you *my* definition of a gentleman? A man who gives the Hornblower his due. [*She rings the bell*] And I think mother ought to call on them. Rolf says old Hornblower resents it fearfully that she's never made a sign to Chloe the three years she's been here.

HILLCRIST. I don't interfere with your mother in

such matters. She may go and call on the devil himself if she likes.

JILL. I know you're ever so much better than she is.

HILLCRIST. That's respectful.

JILL. You do keep your prejudices out of your phiz. But mother literally looks down her nose. And she never forgives an "h." They'd get the "hell" from her if they took the "hinch."

HILLCRIST. Jill—your language!

JILL. Don't slime out of it, Dodo. I say, mother ought to call on the Hornblowers. [*No answer.* Well?

HILLCRIST. My dear, I always let people have the last word. It makes them—feel funny. Ugh! My foot! [*Enter* FELLOWS, *Left.* Fellows, send into the village and get another bottle of this stuff.

JILL. I'll go, darling.

[*She blows him a kiss, and goes out at the window.*

HILLCRIST. And tell cook I've got to go on slops. This foot's worse.

FELLOWS. [*Sympathetic*] Indeed, sir.

HILLCRIST. My third go this year, Fellows.

FELLOWS. Very annoying, sir.

HILLCRIST. Ye—es. Ever had it?

FELLOWS. I fancy I have had a twinge, sir.

HILLCRIST. [*Brightening*] Have you? Where?

FELLOWS. In my cork wrist, sir.

HILLCRIST. Your what?

FELLOWS. The wrist I draw corks with.

HILLCRIST. [*With a cackle*] You'd have had more than a twinge if you'd lived with my father. H'm!

FELLOWS. Excuse me, sir—Vichy water corks, in my experience, are worse than any wine.

HILLCRIST. [*Ironically*] Ah! The country's not what it was, is it, Fellows?

FELLOWS. Getting very new, sir.

HILLCRIST. [*Feelingly*] You're right. Has Dawker come?

FELLOWS. Not yet, sir. The Jackmans would like to see you, sir.

HILLCRIST. What about?

FELLOWS. I don't know, sir.

HILLCRIST. Well, show them in.

FELLOWS. [*Going*] Yes, sir.

HILLCRIST *turns his swivel chair round. The* JACKMANS *come in. He, a big fellow about fifty, in a labourer's dress, with eyes which have more in them than his tongue can express; she, a little woman with a worn face, a bright, quick glance, and a tongue to match.*

HILLCRIST. Good morning, Mrs. Jackman! Morning, Jackman! Haven't seen you for a long time. What can I do?

[*He draws in foot, and breath, with a sharp hiss.*

JACKMAN. [*In a down-hearted voice*] We've had notice to quit, sir.

HILLCRIST. [*With emphasis*] What!

JACKMAN. Got to be out this week.

MRS. J. Yes, sir, indeed.

HILLCRIST. Well, but when I sold Longmeadow and the cottages, it was on the express understanding that there was to be no disturbance of tenancies.

MRS. J. Yes, sir; but we've all got to go. Mrs. 'Arvey, and the Drews, an' us, and there isn't another cottage to be had anywhere in Deepwater.

HILLCRIST. I know; I want one for my cowman. This won't do at all. Where do you get it from?

JACKMAN. Mr. 'Ornblower, 'imself, sir. Just an hour ago. He come round and said: "I'm sorry; I want the cottages, and you've got to clear."

MRS. J. [*Bitterly*] He's no gentleman, sir; he put it so brisk. We been there thirty years, and now we don't know what to do. So I hope you'll excuse us coming round, sir.

HILLCRIST. I should think so, indeed! H'm! [*He rises and limps across to the fireplace on his stick. To himself*] The cloven hoof. By George! this is a breach of faith. I'll write to him, Jackman. Confound it! I'd certainly never have sold if I'd known he was going to do this.

MRS. J. No, sir, I'm sure, sir. They do say it's to do with the potteries. He wants the cottages for his workmen.

HILLCRIST. [*Sharply*] That's all very well, but he shouldn't have led me to suppose that he would make no change.

JACKMAN. [*Heavily*] They talk about his havin' bought the Centry to put up more chimneys there, and that's why he wants the cottages.

HILLCRIST. The Centry! Impossible!

MRS. J. Yes, sir; it's such a pretty spot—looks beautiful from here. [*She looks out through the window*] Loveliest spot in all Deepwater, I always say. And your father owned it, and his father before 'im. It's a pity they ever sold it, sir, beggin' your pardon.

HILLCRIST. The Centry! [*He rings the bell.*

MRS. J. [*Who has brightened up*] I'm glad you're goin' to stop it, sir. It does put us about. We don't know where to go. I said to Mr. Hornblower, I said, "I'm sure Mr. Hillcrist would never 'ave turned us out." An' 'e said: "Mr. Hillcrist be ——" beggin' your pardon, sir. "Make no mistake," 'e said, "you must go, missis." He don't even know our name; an' to come it like this over us! He's a dreadful new man, I think, with his overridin' notions. And sich a heavy-footed man, to look at. [*With a sort of indulgent contempt*] But he's from the North, they say.

[FELLOWS *has entered, Left.*

HILLCRIST. Ask Mrs. Hillcrist if she'll come.

FELLOWS. Very good, sir.

HILLCRIST. Is Dawker here?

FELLOWS. Not yet, sir.

HILLCRIST. I want to see him at once.

[FELLOWS *retires.*

JACKMAN. Mr. Hornblower said he was comin' on to see you, sir. So we thought we'd step along first.

HILLCRIST. Quite right, Jackman.

MRS. J. I said to Jackman: "Mr. Hillcrist'll stand up for us, I know. He's a gentleman," I said. "This

man," I said, "don't care for the neighbourhood, or the people; he don't care for anything so long as he makes his money, and has his importance. You can't expect it, I suppose," I said; [*Bitterly*] "havin' got rich so sudden." The gentry don't do things like that.

HILLCRIST. [*Abstracted*] Quite, Mrs. Jackman, quite! [*To himself*] The Centry! No!

MRS. HILLCRIST *enters. A well-dressed woman, with a firm, clear-cut face.*

Oh! Amy! Mr. and Mrs. Jackman turned out of their cottage, and Mrs. Harvey, and the Drews. When I sold to Hornblower, I stipulated that they shouldn't be.

MRS. J. Our week's up on Saturday, ma'am, and I'm sure I don't know where we shall turn, because of course Jackman must be near his work, and I shall lose me washin' if we have to go far.

HILLCRIST. [*With decision*] You leave it to me, Mrs. Jackman. Good morning! Morning, Jackman! Sorry I can't move with this gout.

MRS. J. [*For them both*] I'm sure we're very sorry, sir. Good morning, sir. Good morning, ma'am; and thank you kindly. [*They go out.*

HILLCRIST. Turning people out that have been there thirty years. I won't have it. It's a breach of faith.

MRS. H. Do you suppose this Hornblower will care two straws about that Jack?

HILLCRIST. He must, when it's put to him, if he's got any decent feeling.

MRS. H. He hasn't.

HILLCRIST. [*Suddenly*] The Jackmans talk of his having bought the Centry to put up more chimneys.

MRS. H. Never! [*At the window, looking out*] Impossible! It would ruin the place utterly, besides cutting us off from the Duke's. Oh, no! Miss Mullins would never sell behind our backs.

HILLCRIST. Anyway I must stop his turning these people out.

MRS. H. [*With a little smile, almost contemptuous*] You might have known he'd do something of the sort. You will imagine people are like yourself, Jack. You always ought to make Dawker have things in black and white.

HILLCRIST. I said quite distinctly: "Of course you won't want to disturb the tenancies; there's a great shortage of cottages." Hornblower told me as distinctly that he wouldn't. What more do you want?

MRS. H. A man like that thinks of nothing but the short cut to his own way. [*Looking out of the window towards the rise*] If he buys the Centry and puts up chimneys, we simply couldn't stop here.

HILLCRIST. My father would turn in his grave.

MRS. H. It would have been more useful if he'd not dipped the estate, and sold the Centry. This Hornblower hates us; he thinks we turn up our noses at him.

HILLCRIST. As we do, Amy.

MRS. H. Who wouldn't? A man without traditions, who believes in nothing but money and push.

HILLCRIST. Suppose he won't budge, can we do anything for the Jackmans?

MRS. H. There are the two rooms Beaver used to have, over the stables. [FELLOWS *enters.*

FELLOWS. Mr. Dawker, sir.

DAWKER *is a short, square, rather red-faced terrier of a man, in riding clothes and gaiters.*

HILLCRIST. Ah! Dawker, I've got gout again.

DAWKER. Very sorry, sir. How de do, ma'am?

HILLCRIST. Did you meet the Jackmans?

DAWKER. Yeh.

[*He hardly ever quite finishes a word, seeming to snap off their tails.*

HILLCRIST. Then you heard?

DAWKER. [*Nodding*] Smart man, Hornblower; never lets grass grow.

HILLCRIST. Smart?

DAWKER. [*Grinning*] Don't do to underrate your neighbours.

MRS. H. A cad—I call him.

DAWKER. That's it, ma'am—got all the advantage.

HILLCRIST. Heard anything about the Centry, Dawker?

DAWKER. Hornblower wants to buy.

HILLCRIST. Miss Mullins would never sell, would she?

DAWKER. She wants to.

HILLCRIST. The deuce she does!

DAWKER. He won't stick at the price either.

MRS. H. What's it worth, Dawker?

DAWKER. Depends on what you want it for.

MRS. H. He wants it for spite; we want it for sentiment.

DAWKER. [*Grinning*] Worth what you like to give, then; but he's a rich man.

MRS. H. Intolerable!

DAWKER. [*To* HILLCRIST] Give me your figure, sir. I'll try the old lady before he gets at her.

HILLCRIST. [*Pondering*] I don't want to buy, unless there's nothing else for it. I should have to raise the money on the estate; it won't stand much more. I can't believe the fellow would be such a barbarian. Chimneys within three hundred yards, right in front of this house! It's a nightmare.

MRS. H. You'd much better let Dawker make sure, Jack.

HILLCRIST. [*Uncomfortable*] Jackman says Hornblower's coming round to see me. I shall put it to him.

DAWKER. Make him keener than ever. Better get in first.

HILLCRIST. Ape his methods!—Ugh! Confound this gout! [*He gets back to his chair with difficulty*] Look here, Dawker, I wanted to see you about gates——

FELLOWS. [*Entering*] Mr. Hornblower.

HORNBLOWER *enters—a man of medium height, thoroughly broadened, blown out, as it were, by success. He has thick, coarse, dark hair, just grizzled, very bushy eyebrows, a wide mouth. He wears quite ordinary clothes, as if that department were in charge of someone*

who knew about such things. He has a small rose in his buttonhole, and carries a Homburg hat, which one suspects will look too small on his head.

HORNBLOWER. Good morning! good morning! How are ye, Dawker? Fine morning! Lovely weather!

His voice has a curious blend in its tone of brass and oil, and an accent not quite Scotch nor quite North country.

Haven't seen ye for a long time, Hillcrist.

HILLCRIST. [*Who has risen*] Not since I sold you Longmeadow and those cottages, I believe.

HORNBLOWER. Dear me, now! that's what I came about.

HILLCRIST. [*Subsiding again into his chair*] Forgive me! Won't you sit down?

HORNBLOWER. [*Not sitting*] Have ye got gout? That's unfortunate. I never get it. I've no disposition that way. Had no ancestors, you see. Just me own drinkin' to answer for.

HILLCRIST. You're lucky.

HORNBLOWER. I wonder if Mrs. Hillcrist thinks that! Am I lucky to have no past, ma'am? Just the future?

MRS. H. You're sure you have the future, Mr. Hornblower?

HORNBLOWER. [*With a laugh*] That's your aristocratic rapier thrust. You aristocrats are very hard people underneath your manners. Ye love to lay a body out. But I've got the future all right.

HILLCRIST. [*Meaningly*] I've had the Jackmans here, Mr. Hornblower.

HORNBLOWER. Who are they—man with the little spitfire wife?

HILLCRIST. They're very excellent, good people, and they've been in that cottage quietly thirty years.

HORNBLOWER. [*Throwing out his forefinger—a favourite gesture*] Ah! ye've wanted me to stir ye up a bit. Deepwater needs a bit o' go put into it. There's generally some go where I am. I daresay you wish there'd been no "come." [*He laughs*].

MRS. H. We certainly like people to keep their word, Mr. Hornblower.

HILLCRIST. Amy!

HORNBLOWER. Never mind, Hillcrist; takes more than that to upset me.

MRS. HILLCRIST *exchanges a look with* DAWKER, *who slips out unobserved.*

HILLCRIST. You promised me, you know, not to change the tenancies.

HORNBLOWER. Well, I've come to tell ye that I have. I wasn't expecting to have the need when I bought. Thought the Duke would sell me a bit down there; but devil a bit he will; and now I must have those cottages for my workmen. I've got important works, ye know.

HILLCRIST. [*Getting heated*] The Jackmans have their importance too, sir. Their heart's in that cottage.

HORNBLOWER. Have a sense of proportion, man. My works supply thousands of people, and *my* heart's

in *them*. What's more, they make my fortune. I've got ambitions—I'm a serious man. Suppose I were to consider this and that, and every little potty objection—where should I get to?—nowhere!

HILLCRIST. All the same, this sort of thing isn't done, you know.

HORNBLOWER. Not by you because ye've got no need to do it. Here ye are, quite content on what your fathers made for ye. Ye've no ambitions; and ye want other people to have none. How d'ye think your fathers got your land?

HILLCRIST. [*Who has risen*] Not by breaking their word.

HORNBLOWER. [*Throwing out his finger*] Don't ye believe it. They got it by breaking their word and turnin' out Jackmans, if that's their name, all over the place.

MRS. H. That's an insult, Mr. Hornblower.

HORNBLOWER. No; it's a repartee. If ye think so much of these Jackmans, build them a cottage yourselves; ye've got the space.

HILLCRIST. That's beside the point. You promised me, and I sold on that understanding.

HORNBLOWER. And I bought on the understandin' that I'd get some more land from the Duke.

HILLCRIST. That's nothing to do with me.

HORNBLOWER. Ye'll find it has; because I'm going to have those cottages.

HILLCRIST. Well, I call it simply—

[*He checks himself.*

HORNBLOWER. Look here, Hillcrist, ye've not had occasion to understand men like me. I've got the guts, and I've got the money, and I don't sit still on it. I'm going ahead because I believe in meself. I've no use for sentiment and that sort of thing. Forty of your Jackmans aren't worth me little finger.

HILLCRIST. [*Angry*] Of all the blatant things I ever heard said!——

HORNBLOWER. Well, as we're speaking plainly, I've been thinkin'. Ye want the village run your old-fashioned way, and I want it run mine. I fancy there's not room for the two of us here.

MRS. H. When are you going?

HORNBLOWER. Never fear, *I'm* not going.

HILLCRIST. Look here, Mr. Hornblower—this infernal gout makes me irritable—puts me at a disadvantage. But I should be glad if you'd kindly explain yourself.

HORNBLOWER. [*With a great smile*] Ca' canny; I'm fra' the North.

HILLCRIST. I'm told you wish to buy the Centry and put more of your chimneys up there, regardless of the fact [*He points through the window*] that it would utterly ruin the house we've had for generations, and all our pleasure here.

HORNBLOWER. How the man talks! Why! Ye'd think he owned the sky, because his fathers built him a house with a pretty view, where he's nothing to do but live. It's sheer want of something to do that gives ye your fine sentiments, Hillcrist.

HILLCRIST. Have the goodness not to charge me with idleness. Dawker—where is he?—[*He shows the bureau*] When you do the drudgery of your works as thoroughly as I do that of my estate—— Is it true about the Centry?

HORNBLOWER. Gospel true. If ye want to know, my son Chearlie is buyin' it this very minute.

MRS. H. [*Turning with a start*] What do you say?

HORNBLOWER. Ay, he's with the old lady; she wants to sell, an' she'll get her price, whatever it is.

HILLCRIST. [*With deep anger*] If that isn't a skin game, Mr. Hornblower, I don't know what is.

HORNBLOWER. Ah! Ye've got a very nice expression there. "Skin game!" Well, bad words break no bones, an' they're wonderful for hardenin' the heart. If it wasn't for a lady's presence, I could give ye a specimen or two.

Mrs. H. Oh! Mr. Hornblower, that need not stop you, I'm sure.

HORNBLOWER. Well, and I don't know that it need. Ye're an obstruction—the like of you—ye're in my path. And anyone in my path doesn't stay there long; or, if he does, he stays there on my terms. And my terms are chimneys in the Centry where I need 'em. It'll do ye a power of good, too, to know that ye're not almighty.

HILLCRIST. And that's being neighbourly!

HORNBLOWER. And how have ye tried bein' neighbourly to me? If I haven't a wife, I've got a daughter-in-law. Have ye called on her, ma'am? I'm new,

and ye're an old family. Ye don't like me, ye think I'm a pushin' man. I go to chapel, an' ye don't like that. I make things and I sell them, and ye don't like that. I buy land, and ye don't like that. It threatens the view from your windies. Well, I don't like you, and I'm not goin' to put up with your attitude. Ye've had things your own way too long, and now ye're not going to have them any longer.

HILLCRIST. Will you hold to your word over those cottages?

HORNBLOWER. I'm goin' to have the cottages. I need them, and more besides, now I'm to put up me new works.

HILLCRIST. That's a declaration of war.

HORNBLOWER. Ye never said a truer word. It's one or the other of us, and I rather think it's goin' to be me. I'm the risin' and you're the settin' sun, as the poet says.

HILLCRIST. [*Touching the bell*] We shall see if you can ride rough-shod like this. We used to have decent ways of going about things here. You want to change all that. Well, we shall do our damnedest to stop you. [*To* FELLOWS *at the door*] Are the Jackmans still in the house? Ask them to be good enough to come in.

HORNBLOWER. [*With the first sign of uneasiness*] I've seen these people. I've nothing more to say to them. I told 'em I'd give 'em five pounds to cover their moving.

HILLCRIST. It doesn't occur to you that people, however humble, like to have some say in their own fate?

HORNBLOWER. I never had any say in mine till I had the brass, and nobody ever will. It's all hypocrisy. You county folk are fair awful hypocrites. Ye talk about good form and all that sort o' thing. It's just the comfortable doctrine of the man in the saddle; sentimental varnish. Ye're every bit as hard as I am, underneath.

MRS. H. [*Who had been standing very still all this time*] You flatter us.

HORNBLOWER. Not at all. God helps those who 'elp themselves—that's at the bottom of all religion. I'm goin' to help meself, and God's going to help me.

MRS. H. I admire your knowledge.

HILLCRIST. We are in the right, and God helps——

HORNBLOWER. Don't ye believe it; ye 'aven't got the energy.

MRS. H. Nor perhaps the conceit.

HORNBLOWER. [*Throwing out his forefinger*] No, no; 'tisn't conceit to believe in yourself when ye've got reason to. [*The* JACKMANS *have entered.*

HILLCRIST. I'm very sorry, Mrs. Jackman, but I just wanted you to realise that I've done my best with this gentleman.

MRS. J. [*Doubtfully*] Yes, sir. I thought if you spoke for us, he'd feel different-like.

HORNBLOWER. One cottage is the same as another, missis. I made ye a fair offer of five pounds for the moving.

JACKMAN. [*Slowly*] We wouldn't take fifty to go out of that 'ouse. We brought up three children there, an' buried two from it.

MRS. J. [*To* MRS. HILLCRIST] We're attached to it like, ma'am.

HILLCRIST. [*To* HORNBLOWER] How would you like being turned out of a place you were fond of?

HORNBLOWER. Not a bit. But little considerations have to give way to big ones. Now, missis, I'll make it ten pounds, and I'll send a wagon to shift your things. If that isn't fair—! Ye'd better accept, I shan't keep it open.

The JACKMANS *look at each other; their faces show deep anger—and the question they ask each other is which will speak.*

MRS. J. We won't take it; eh, George?

JACKMAN. Not a farden. We come there when we was married.

HORNBLOWER. [*Throwing out his finger*] Ye're very improvident folk.

HILLCRIST. Don't lecture them, Mr. Hornblower; they come out of this miles above you.

HORNBLOWER. [*Angry*] Well, I *was* going to give ye another week, but ye'll go out next Saturday; and take care ye're not late, or your things'll be put out—in the rain.

MRS. H. [*To* MRS. JACKMAN] We'll send down for your things, and you can come to us for the time being.

MRS. JACKMAN *drops a curtsey; her eyes stab* HORNBLOWER.

JACKMAN. [*Heavily, clenching his fists*] You're no gentleman! Don't put temptation in my way, that's all.

HILLCRIST. [*In a low voice*] Jackman!

HORNBLOWER. [*Triumphantly*] Ye hear that? That's your protegee! Keep out o' *my* way, me man, or I'll put the police on to ye for utterin' threats.

HILLCRIST. You'd better go now, Jackman.

[*The* JACKMANS *move to the door.*

MRS. J. [*Turning*] Maybe you'll repent it some day, sir. [*They go out,* MRS. HILLCRIST *following.*

HORNBLOWER. We—ell, I'm sorry they're such unreasonable folk. I never met people with less notion of which side their bread was buttered.

HILLCRIST. And I never met anyone so pachydermatous.

HORNBLOWER. What's that, in Heaven's name? Ye needn' wrap it up in long words now your good lady's gone.

HILLCRIST. [*With dignity*] I'm not going in for a slanging match. I resent your conduct much too deeply.

HORNBLOWER. Look here, Hillcrist, I don't object to you personally; ye seem to me a poor creature that's bound to get left with your gout and your dignity; but of course ye can make yourself very disagreeable before ye're done. Now I want to be the movin' spirit here. I'm full of plans. I'm goin' to stand for Parliament; I'm goin' to make this a prosperous place. I'm a good-natured man if you'll treat me as such. Now, you take me on as a neighbour and all that, and I'll manage without chimneys on the Centry. Is it a bargain? [*He holds out his hand.*

HILLCRIST. [*Ignoring it*] I thought you said you didn't keep your word when it suited you to break it?

HORNBLOWER. Now, don't get on the high horse. You and me could be very good friends; but I can be a very nasty enemy. The chimneys will not look nice from that windie, ye know.

HILLCRIST. [*Deeply angry*] Mr. Hornblower, if you think I'll take your hand after this Jackman business, you're greatly mistaken. You are proposing that I shall stand in with you while you tyrannise over the neighbourhood. Please realise that unless you leave those tenancies undisturbed as you said you would, we don't know each other.

HORNBLOWER. Well, that won't trouble me much. Now, ye'd better think it over; ye've got gout and that makes ye hasty. I tell ye again: I'm not the man to make an enemy of. Unless ye're friendly, sure as I stand here I'll ruin the look of your place.

[*The toot of a car is heard.*

There's my car. I sent Chearlie and his wife in it to buy the Centry. And make no mistake—he's got it in his pocket. It's your last chance, Hillcrist. I'm not averse to you as a man; I think ye're the best of the fossils round here; at least, I think ye can do me the most harm socially. Come now!

[*He holds out his hand again.*

HILLCRIST. Not if you'd bought the Centry ten times over. Your ways are not mine, and I'll have nothing to do with you.

HORNBLOWER. [*Very angry*] Really! Is that so? Very well. Now ye're goin' to learn something, an'

it's time ye did. D'ye realise that I'm very nearly round ye? [*He draws a circle slowly in the air*] I'm at Uphill, the works are here, here's Longmeadow, here's the Centry that I've just bought, there's only the Common left to give ye touch with the world. Now between you and the Common there's the high road. I come out on the high road here to your north, and I shall come out on it there to your west. When I've got me new works up on the Centry, I shall be makin' a trolley track between the works up to the road at both ends, so my goods will be running right round ye. How'll ye like that for a country place?

For answer HILLCRIST, *who is angry beyond the power of speech, walks, forgetting to use his stick, up to the French window. While he stands there, with his back to* HORNBLOWER, *the door L. is flung open, and* JILL *enters, preceding* CHARLES, *his wife* CHLOE, *and* ROLF. CHARLES *is a goodish-looking, moustached young man of about twenty-eight, with a white rim to the collar of his waistcoat, and spats. He has his hand behind* CHLOE'S *back, as if to prevent her turning tail. She is rather a handsome young woman, with dark eyes, full red lips, and a suspicion of powder, a little under-dressed for the country.* ROLF, *who brings up the rear, is about twenty, with an open face and stiffish butter-coloured hair.* JILL *runs over to her father at the window. She has a bottle.*

JILL. [*Sotto voce*] Look, Dodo, I've brought the lot!

Isn't it a treat, dear Papa? And here's the stuff. Hallo!

The exclamation is induced by the apprehension that there has been a row. HILLCRIST *gives a stiff little bow, remaining where he is in the window.* JILL *stays close to him, staring from one to the other, then blocks him off and engages him in conversation.* CHARLES *has gone up to his father, who has remained maliciously still, where he delivered his last speech.* CHLOE *and* ROLF *stand awkwardly waiting between the fireplace and the door.*

HORNBLOWER. Well, Chearlie?

CHARLES. Not got it.

HORNBLOWER. *Not!*

CHARLES. I'd practically got her to say she'd sell at three thousand five hundred, when that fellow Dawker turned up.

HORNBLOWER. That bull-terrier of a chap! Why, he was *here* a while ago. Oh—ho! So that's it!

CHARLES. I heard him gallop up. He came straight for the old lady, and got her away. What he said I don't know; but she came back looking wiser than an owl; said she'd think it over, thought she had other views.

HORNBLOWER. Did ye tell her she might have her price?

CHARLES. Practically I did.

HORNBLOWER. Well?

CHARLES. She thought it would be fairer to put it

up to auction. There were other enquiries. Oh! She's a leery old bird—reminds me of one of those pictures of Fate, don't you know.

HORNBLOWER. Auction! Well, if it's not gone we'll get it yet. That damned little Dawker! I've had a row with Hillcrist.

CHARLES. I thought so.

They are turning cautiously to look at HILLCRIST, *when* JILL *steps forward.*

JILL. [*Flushed and determined*] That's not a bit sporting of you, Mr. Hornblower.

[*At her words* ROLF *comes forward too.*

HORNBLOWER. Ye should hear both sides before ye say that, missy.

JILL. There isn't another side to turning out the Jackmans after you'd promised.

HORNBLOWER. Oh! dear me, yes. They don't matter a row of gingerbread to the schemes I've got for betterin' this neighbourhood.

JILL. I *had* been standing up for you; now I won't.

HORNBLOWER. Dear, dear! What'll become of me?

JILL. I won't say anything about the other thing because I think it's beneath dignity to notice it. But to turn poor people out of their cottages is a shame.

HORNBLOWER. Hoity me!

ROLF. [*Suddenly*] You haven't been doing that, father?

CHARLES. Shut up, Rolf!

HORNBLOWER. [*Turning on* ROLF] Ha! Here's a league o' youth! My young whipper-snapper, keep

your mouth shut and leave it to your elders to know what's right.

Under the weight of this rejoinder ROLF *stands biting his lips. Then he throws his head up.*

ROLF. I hate it!

HORNBLOWER. [*With real venom*] Oh! Ye hate it? Ye can get out of my house, then.

JILL. Free speech, Mr. Hornblower; don't be violent.

HORNBLOWER. Ye're right, young lady. Ye can stay in my house, Rolf, and learn manners. Come, Chearlie!

JILL. [*Quite softly*] Mr. Hornblower!

HILLCRIST. [*From the window*] Jill!

JILL. [*Impatiently*] Well, what's the good of it? Life's too short for rows, and too jolly!

ROLF. Bravo!

HORNBLOWER. [*Who has shown a sign of weakening*] Now, look here! I will not have revolt in my family. Ye'll just have to learn that a man who's worked as I have, who's risen as I have, and who knows the world, is the proper judge of what's right and wrong. I'll answer to God for me actions, and not to you young people.

JILL. Poor God!

HORNBLOWER. [*Genuinely shocked*] Ye blasphemous young thing! [*To* ROLF] And ye're just as bad, ye young freethinker. I won't have it.

HILLCRIST. [*Who has come down, Right*] Jill, I wish you would kindly not talk.

JILL. I can't help it.

CHARLES. [*Putting his arm through* HORNBLOWER'S] Come along, father! Deeds, not words.

HORNBLOWER. Ay! Deeds!

MRS. HILLCRIST *and* DAWKER *have entered by the French window.*

MRS. H. Quite right!

[*They all turn and look at her.*

HORNBLOWER. Ah! So ye put your dog on to it. [*He throws out his finger at* DAWKER] Very smart, that —I give ye credit.

MRS. H. [*Pointing to* CHLOE, *who has stood by herself, forgotten and uncomfortable throughout the scene*] May I ask who this lady is?

CHLOE *turns round startled, and her vanity bag slips down her dress to the floor.*

HORNBLOWER. No, ma'am, ye may not, for ye know perfectly well.

JILL. *I* brought her in, mother [*She moves to* CHLOE'S *side*].

MRS. H. Will you take her out again, then.

HILLCRIST. Amy, have the goodness to remember——

MRS. H. That this is my house so far as ladies are concerned.

JILL. Mother!

She looks astonished at CHLOE, *who, about to speak, does not, passing her eyes, with a queer, half-scared expression, from* MRS. HILLCRIST *to* DAWKER.

[*To* CHLOE] I'm awfully sorry. Come on!

[*They go out, Left.* ROLF *hurries after them.*

CHARLES. You've insulted my wife. Why? What do you mean by it?

[MRS. HILLCRIST *simply smiles.*

HILLCRIST. I apologise. I regret extremely. There is no reason why the ladies of your family or of mine should be involved in our quarrel. For Heaven's sake, let's fight like gentlemen.

HORNBLOWER. Catchwords—sneers! No; we'll play what ye call a skin game, Hillcrist, without gloves on; we won't spare each other. Ye look out for yourselves, for, begod, after this morning I mean business. And as for you, Dawker, ye sly dog, ye think yourself very clever; but I'll have the Centry yet. Come, Chearlie!

They go out, passing JILL, *who is coming in again, in the doorway.*

HILLCRIST. Well, Dawker?

DAWKER. [*Grinning*] Safe for the moment. The old lady'll put it up to auction. Couldn't get her to budge from that. Says she don't want to be unneighbourly to either. But, if you ask me, it's money she smells!

JILL. [*Advancing*] *Now,* mother!

MRS. H. Well?

JILL. Why did you insult her?

MRS. H. I think I only asked you to take her out.

JILL. Why? Even if she is Old Combustion's daughter-in-law?

MRS. H. My dear Jill, allow me to judge the sort of acquaintances I wish to make. [*She looks at* DAWKER.

JILL. She's all right. Lots of women powder and touch up their lips nowadays. I think she's rather a good sort; she was awfully upset.

MRS. H. Too upset.

JILL. Oh! don't be so mysterious, mother. If you know something, do spit it out!

MRS. H. Do you wish me to—er—"spit it out," Jack?

HILLCRIST. Dawker, if you don't mind——

DAWKER, with a nod, passes away out of the French window.

Jill, be respectful, and don't talk like a bargee.

JILL. It's no good, Dodo. It made me ashamed. It's just as—as caddish to insult people who haven't said a word, in your own house, as it is to be—old Hornblower.

MRS. H. You don't know what you're talking about.

HILLCRIST. What's the matter with young Mrs. Hornblower?

MRS. H. Excuse me, I shall keep my thoughts to myself at present.

She looks coldly at JILL, and goes out through the French window.

HILLCRIST. You've thoroughly upset your mother, Jill.

JILL. It's something Dawker's told her; I saw them. I don't like Dawker, father, he's so common.

HILLCRIST. My dear, we can't all be uncommon. He's got lots of go. You must apologise to your mother.

JILL. [*Shaking her clubbed hair*] They'll make you do things you don't approve of, Dodo, if you don't look out. Mother's fearfully bitter when she gets her

knife in. If old Hornblower's disgusting, it's no reason we should be.

HILLCRIST. So you think I'm capable—that's nice, Jill!

JILL. No, no, darling! I only want to warn you solemnly that mother'll tell you you're fighting fair, no matter what she and Dawker do.

HILLCRIST. [*Smiling*] Jill, I don't think I ever saw you so serious.

JILL. No. Because—[*She swallows a lump in her throat*] Well—I was just beginning to enjoy myself; and now—everything's going to be bitter and beastly, with mother in that mood. That horrible old man! Oh, Dodo! Don't let them make *you* horrid! You're such a darling. How's your gout, ducky?

HILLCRIST. Better; lot better.

JILL. There, you see! That shows! It's going to be half interesting for you, but not for—us.

HILLCRIST. Look here, Jill—is there anything between you and young what's-his-name—Rolf?

JILL. [*Biting her lip*] No. But—now it's *all* spoiled.

HILLCRIST. You can't expect me to regret that.

JILL. I don't mean any tosh about love's young dream; but I do like being friends. I want to *enjoy* things, Dodo, and you can't do that when everybody's on the hate. You're going to wallow in it, and so shall I—oh! I know I shall!—we shall all wallow, and think of nothing but "one for his nob."

HILLCRIST. Aren't you fond of your home?

JILL. Of course. I love it.

HILLCRIST. Well, you won't be able to live in it unless we stop that ruffian. Chimneys and smoke, the trees cut down, piles of pots. Every kind of abomination. There! [*He points*] Imagine! [*He points through the French window, as if he could see those chimneys rising and marring the beauty of the fields*] I was born here, and my father, and his, and his, and his. They loved those fields, and those old trees. And this barbarian, with his "improvement" schemes, forsooth! I learned to ride in the Centry meadows—prettiest spring meadows in the world; I've climbed every tree there. Why my father ever sold——! But who could have imagined this? And come at a bad moment, when money's scarce.

JILL. [*Cuddling his arm*] Dodo!

HILLCRIST. Yes. But you don't love the place as I do, Jill. You youngsters don't love anything, I sometimes think.

JILL. I do, Dodo, I do!

HILLCRIST. You've got it all before you. But you may live your life and never find anything so good and so beautiful as this old home. I'm not going to have it spoiled without a fight.

Conscious of having betrayed sentiment, he walks out at the French window, passing away to the Right. JILL, *following to the window, looks. Then throwing back her head, she clasps her hands behind it.*

JILL. Oh—oh—oh!

*A voice behind her says, "*JILL!*" She turns and starts back, leaning against the right lin-*

tel of the window. ROLF *appears outside the window from Left.*

Who goes there?

ROLF. [*Buttressed against the Left lintel*] Enemy—after Chloe's bag.

JILL. Pass, enemy! And all's ill!

ROLF *passes through the window, and retrieves the vanity bag from the floor where* CHLOE *dropped it, then again takes his stand against the Left lintel of the French window.*

ROLF. It's not going to make any difference, is it?

JILL. You know it is.

ROLF. Sins of the fathers.

JILL. Unto the third and fourth generations. What sin has *my* father committed?

ROLF. None, in a way; only, I've often told you I don't see why you should treat us as outsiders. We don't like it.

JILL. Well, you shouldn't be, then; I mean, *he* shouldn't be.

ROLF. Father's just as human as your father; he's wrapped up in us, and all his "getting on" is for us. Would you like to be treated as your mother treated Chloe? Your mother's set the stroke for the other big-wigs about here; nobody calls on Chloe. And why not? Why not? I think it's contemptible to bar people just because they're *new*, as you call it, and have to make their position instead of having it left them.

JILL. It's *not* because they're new, it's because—if your father behaved like a gentleman, he'd be treated like one.

ROLF. Would he? I don't believe it. My father's a very able man; he thinks he's entitled to have influence here. Well, everybody tries to keep him down. Oh! yes, they do. That makes him mad and more determined than ever to get his way. You ought to be just, Jill.

JILL. I *am* just.

ROLF. No, you're not. Besides, what's it got to do with Charlie and Chloe? Chloe's particularly harmless. It's pretty sickening for her. Father didn't expect people to call until Charlie married, but since——

JILL. I think it's all very petty.

ROLF. It *is*—a dog-in-the-manger business; I did think *you* were above it.

JILL. How would you like to have your home spoiled?

ROLF. I'm not going to argue. Only things don't stand still. Homes aren't any more proof against change than anything else.

JILL. All right! You come and try and take ours.

ROLF. We don't want to take your home.

JILL. Like the Jackmans'?

ROLF. All right. I see you're hopelessly prejudiced.

[*He turns to go.*

JILL. [*Just as he is vanishing—softly*] Enemy?

ROLF. [*Turning*] Yes, enemy.

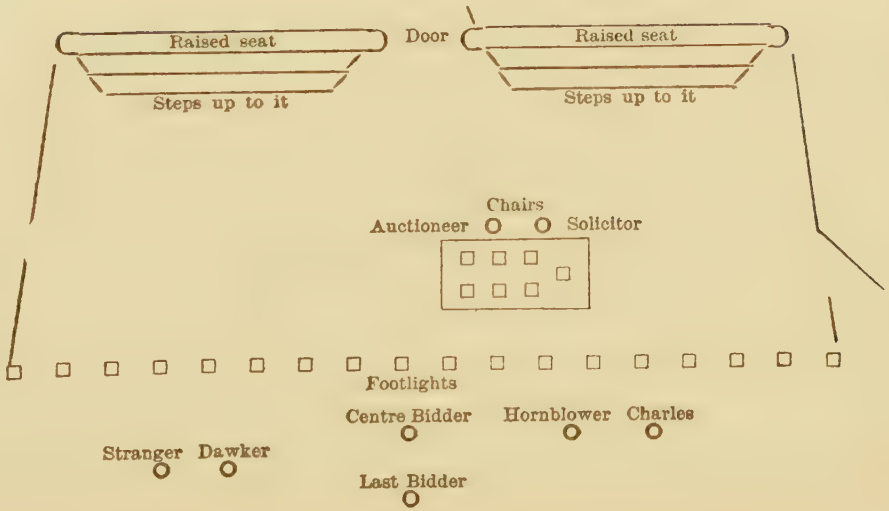
JILL. Before the battle—let's shake hands.

They move from the lintels and grasp each other's hands in the centre of the French window.

CURTAIN

ACT II

ACT II. Scene I.



ACT II

SCENE I

A billiard room in a provincial hotel, where things are bought and sold. The scene is set well forward, and is not very broad; it represents the auctioneer's end of the room, having, rather to stage Left, a narrow table with two chairs facing the audience, where the auctioneer will sit and stand. The table, which is set forward to the footlights, is littered with green-covered particulars of sale. The audience are in effect public and bidders. There is a door on the Left, level with the table. Along the back wall, behind the table, are two raised benches with two steps up to them, such as billiard rooms often have, divided by a door in the middle of a wall, which is panelled in oak. Late September sunlight is coming from a skylight (not visible) on to these seats. The stage is empty when the curtain goes up, but DAWKER *and* MRS. HILLCRIST *are just entering through the door at the back.*

DAWKER. Be out of their way here, ma'am. See old Hornblower with Chearlie?

[*He points down to the audience.*

MRS. H. It begins at three, doesn't it?

DAWKER. They won't be over-punctual; there's only the Centry selling. There's young Mrs. Hornblower with the other boy—[*Pointing*] over at the entrance. I've got that chap I told you of down from town.

MRS. H. Ah! make sure quite of her, Dawker. Any mistake would be fatal.

DAWKER. [*Nodding*] That's right, ma'am. Lot of people—always spare time to watch an auction—ever remark that? The Duke's agent's here; shouldn't be surprised if he chipped in.

MRS. H. Where did you leave my husband?

DAWKER. With Miss Jill, in the courtyard. He's coming to you. In case I miss him, tell him when I reach his limit to blow his nose if he wants me to go on; when he blows it a second time, I'll stop for good. Hope we shan't get to that. Old Hornblower doesn't throw his money away.

MRS. H. What limit did you settle?

DAWKER. Six thousand!

MRS. H. That's a fearful price. Well, good luck to you, Dawker!

DAWKER. Good luck, ma'am. I'll go and see to that little matter of Mrs. Chloe. Never fear, we'll do them in somehow.

He winks, lays his finger on the side of his nose, and goes out at the door.

MRS. HILLCRIST *mounts the two steps, sits down Right of the door, and puts up a pair of long-handled glasses. Through the door be-*

hind her come CHLOE *and* ROLF. *She makes a sign for him to go, and shuts the door.*

CHLOE. [*At the foot of the steps—in the gangway—in a slightly common accent*] Mrs. Hillcrist!

MRS. H. [*Not quite starting*] I beg your pardon?

CHLOE. [*Again*] Mrs. Hillcrist——

MRS. H. Well?

CHLOE. I never did you any harm.

MRS. H. Did I ever say you did?

CHLOE. No; but you act as if I had.

MRS. H. I'm not aware that I've acted at all—as yet. You are nothing to me, except as one of your family.

CHOLE. 'Tisn't I that wants to spoil your home.

MRS. H. Stop them then. I see your husband down there with his father.

CHLOE. I—I have tried.

MRS. H. [*Looking at her*] Oh! I suppose such men don't pay attention to what women ask them.

CHLOE. [*With a flash of spirit*] I'm fond of my husband. I——

MRS. H. [*Looking at her steadily*] I don't quite know why you spoke to me.

CHLOE. [*With a sort of pathetic sullenness*] I only thought perhaps you'd like to treat me as a human being.

MRS. H. Really, if you don't mind, I should like to be left alone just now.

CHLOE. [*Unhappily acquiescent*] Certainly! I'll go to the other end.

She moves to the Left, mounts the steps and sits down.

ROLF, *looking in through the door, and seeing where she is, joins her.* MRS. HILLCRIST *resettles herself a little further in on the Right.*

ROLF. [*Bending over to* CHLOE, *after a glance at* MRS. HILLCRIST] Are you all right?

CHLOE. It's awfully hot.

She fans herself with the particulars of sale.

ROLF. There's Dawker. I hate that chap!

CHLOE. Where?

ROLF. Down there; see?

He points down to stage Right of the room.

CHLOE. [*Drawing back in her seat with a little gasp*] Oh!

ROLF. [*Not noticing*] Who's that next him, looking up here?

CHLOE. I don't know.

She has raised her auction programme suddenly, and sits fanning herself, carefully screening her face.

ROLF. [*Looking at her*] Don't you feel well? Shall I get you some water? [*He gets up at her nod.*

As he reaches the door, HILLCRIST *and* JILL *come in.* HILLCRIST *passes him abstractedly with a nod, and sits down beside his wife.*

JILL. [*To* ROLF] Come to see us turned out?

ROLF. [*Emphatically*] No. I'm looking after Chloe; she's not well.

JILL. [*Glancing at her*] Sorry. She needn't have come, I suppose? [ROLF *deigns no answer, and goes out.*

JILL glances at CHLOE, then at her parents talking in low voices, and sits down next her father, who makes room for her.

MRS. H. Can Dawker see you there, Jack?

[HILLCRIST *nods.*

What's the time?

HILLCRIST. Three minutes to three.

JILL. Don't you feel beastly all down the backs of your legs, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Yes.

JILL. Do you, mother?

MRS. H. No.

JILL. A wagon of old Hornblower's pots passed while we were in the yard. It's an omen.

MRS. H. Don't be foolish, Jill.

JILL. Look at the old brute! Dodo, hold my hand.

MRS. H. Make sure you've got a handkerchief, Jack.

HILLCRIST. I can't go beyond the six thousand; I shall have to raise every penny on mortgage as it is. The estate simply won't stand more, Amy.

He feels in his breast pocket, and pulls up the edge of his handkerchief.

JILL. Oh! Look! There's Miss Mullins, at the back; just come in. Isn't she a spidery old chip?

MRS. H. Come to gloat. Really, I think her not accepting your offer is disgusting. Her impartiality is all humbug.

HILLCRIST. Can't blame her for getting what she can—it's human nature. Phew! I used to feel like this before a *viva voce*. Who's that next to Dawker?

JILL. What a fish!

MRS. H. [*To herself*] Ah! yes.

Her eyes slide round at CHLOE, *sitting motionless and rather sunk in her seat, slowly fanning herself with the particulars of the sale.*

Jack, go and offer her my smelling salts.

HILLCRIST. [*Taking the salts*] Thank God for a human touch!

MRS. H. [*Taken aback*] Oh! I——

JILL. [*With a quick look at her mother, snatching the salts*] I will. [*She goes over to* CHLOE *with the salts*] Have a sniff; you look awfully white.

CHLOE. [*Looking up, startled*] Oh! no thanks. I'm all right.

JILL. No, do! You must. [CHLOE *takes them.*

JILL. D'you mind letting me see that a minute?

She takes the particulars of the sale and studies it, but CHLOE *has buried the lower part of her face in her hand and the smelling salts bottle.*

Beastly hot, isn't it? You'd better keep that.

CHLOE. [*Her dark eyes wandering and uneasy*] Rolf's getting me some water.

JILL. Why do you stay? You didn't want to come, did you? [CHLOE *shakes her head.*

All right! Here's your water.

She hands back the particulars and slides over to her seat, passing ROLF *in the gangway, with her chin well up.*

MRS. HILLCRIST, *who has watched* CHLOE *and* JILL *and* DAWKER *and his friend, makes an*

enquiring movement with her hand, but gets a disappointing answer.

JILL. What's the time, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. [*Looking at his watch*] Three minutes past.

JILL. [*Sighing*] Oh, hell!

HILLCRIST. Jill!

JILL. Sorry, Dodo. I was only thinking. Look! Here he is! Phew!—isn't he——?

MRS. H. 'Sh!

The AUCTIONEER *comes in Left and goes to the table. He is a square, short, brown-faced, common-looking man, with clipped grey hair fitting him like a cap, and a clipped grey moustache. His lids come down over his quick eyes, till he can see you very sharply, and you can hardly see that he can see you. He can break into a smile at any moment, which has no connection with him, as it were. By a certain hurt look, however, when bidding is slow, he discloses that he is not merely an auctioneer, but has in him elements of the human being. He can wink with anyone, and is dressed in a snuff-brown suit, with a perfectly unbuttoned waistcoat, a low, turned-down collar, and small black and white sailor-knot tie. While he is settling his papers, the* HILLCRISTS *settle themselves tensely.* CHLOE *has drunk her water and leaned back again, with the smelling salts to her nose.* ROLF *leans forward in the seat beside her, looking*

sideways at JILL. *A* SOLICITOR, *with a grey beard, has joined the* AUCTIONEER *at his table.*

AUCTIONEER. [*Tapping the table*] Sorry to disappoint you, gentlemen, but I've only one property to offer you to-day, No. 1, The Centry, Deepwater. The second on the particulars has been withdrawn. The third—that's Bidcot, desirable freehold mansion and farmlands in the Parish of Kenway—we shall have to deal with next week. I shall be happy to sell it you then without reservation. [*He looks again through the particulars in his hand, giving the audience time to readjust themselves to his statements*] Now, gen'lemen, as I say, I've only the one property to sell. Freehold No. 1—all that very desirable corn and stock-rearing and parklike residential land known as the Centry, Deepwater, unique property—an A.1. chance to an A.1. audience. [*With his smile*] Ought to make the price of the three we thought we had. Now you won't mind listening to the conditions of sale: Mr. Blinkard'll read 'em, and they won't wirry you, they're very short.

He sits down and gives two little taps on the table.

The SOLICITOR *rises and reads the conditions of sale in a voice which no one practically can hear. Just as he begins to read these conditions of sale,* CHARLES HORNBLOWER *enters at back. He stands a moment, glancing round at the* HILLCRISTS *and twirling his moustache, then moves along to his wife and touches her.*

CHARLES. Chloe, aren't you well?

In the start which she gives, her face is fully revealed to the audience.

CHARLES. Come along, out of the way of these people.

He jerks his head towards the HILLCRISTS. CHLOE *gives a swift look down to the stage Right of the audience.*

CHLOE. No; I'm all right; it's hotter there.

CHARLES. [*To* ROLF] Well, look after her—I must go back.

ROLF *nods.* CHARLES *slides back to the door, with a glance at the* HILLCRISTS, *of whom* MRS. HILLCRIST *has been watching like a lynx. He goes out, just as the* SOLICITOR, *finishing, sits down.*

AUCTIONEER. [*Rising and tapping*] Now, gen'lemen, it's not often a piece of land like this comes into the market. What's that? [*To a friend in front of him*] No better land in Deepwater—that's right, Mr. Spicer. I know the village well, and a charming place it is; perfect locality, to be sure. Now I don't want to wirry you by singing the praises of this property; there it is—well-watered, nicely timbered—no reservation of the timber, gen'lemen—no tenancy to hold you up; free to do what you like with it to-morrow. You've got a jewel of a site there, too; perfect position for a house. It lies between the Duke's and Squire Hillcrist's—an emerald isle. [*With his smile*] No allusion to Ireland, gen'lemen—perfect peace in the Centry. Nothing like it in the county—a gen'leman's site, and you don't get that offered you every day. [*He looks*

down towards HORNBLOWER, *stage Left*] Carries the mineral rights, and as you know, perhaps, there's the very valuable Deepwater clay there. What am I to start it at? Can I say three thousand? Well, anything you like to give me. I'm not particular. Come now, you've got more time than me, I expect. Two hundred acres of first-rate grazin' and cornland, with a site for a residence unequalled in the county; and all the possibilities! Well, what shall I say?

[*Bid from* SPICER.

Two thousand? [*With his smile*] That won't hurt you, Mr. Spicer. Why, it's worth that to overlook the Duke. For two thousand?

[*Bid from* HORNBLOWER, *stage Left.*

And five. Thank you, sir. Two thousand five hundred bid. [*To a friend just below him.*

Come, Mr. Sandy, don't scratch your head over it.

[*Bid from* DAWKER, *stage Right.*

And five. Three thousand bid for this desirable property. Why, you'd think it wasn't desirable. Come along, gen'lemen. A little spirit. [*A slight pause.*

JILL. Why can't I *see* the bids, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. The last was Dawker's.

AUCTIONEER. For three thousand. [HORNBLOWER] Three thousand five hundred? May I say four? [*A bid from the centre*] No, I'm not particular; I'll take hundreds. Three thousand six hundred bid. [HORNBLOWER] And seven. Three thousand seven hundred, and—— [*He pauses, quartering the audience.*

JILL. Who was that, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Hornblower. It's the Duke in the centre.

AUCTIONEER. Come, gen'lemen, don't keep me all day. Four thousand may I say? [DAWKER] Thank you. We're beginning. And one? [*A bid from the centre*] Four thousand one hundred. [HORNBLOWER] Four thousand two hundred. May I have yours, sir? [*To* DAWKER] And three. Four thousand three hundred bid. No such site in the county, gen'lemen. I'm going to sell this land for what it's worth. You can't bid too much for me. [*He smiles*] [HORNBLOWER] Four thousand five hundred bid. [*Bid from the centre*] And six. [DAWKER] And seven. [HORNBLOWER] And eight. Nine, may I say? [*But the centre has dried up*] [DAWKER] And nine. [HORNBLOWER] Five thousand. Five thousand bid. That's better; there's some spirit in it. For five thousand.

[*He pauses while he speaks to the* SOLICITOR.

HILLCRIST. It's a duel now.

AUCTIONEER. Now, gen'lemen, I'm not going to give this property away. Five thousand bid. [DAWKER] And one. [HORNBLOWER] And two. [DAWKER] And three. Five thousand three hundred bid. And five, did you say, sir? [HORNBLOWER] Five thousand five hundred bid. [*He looks at his particulars.*

JILL. [*Rather agonised*] Enemy, Dodo.

AUCTIONEER. This chance may never come again.

"How you'll regret it
If you don't get it,"

as the poet says. May I say five thousand six hun-

dred, sir? [DAWKER] Five thousand six hundred bid. [HORNBLOWER] And seven. [DAWKER] And eight. For five thousand eight hundred pounds. We're gettin' on, but we haven't got the value yet.

A slight pause, while he wipes his brow at the success of his own efforts.

JILL. Us, Dodo?

HILLCRIST *nods.* JILL *looks over at* ROLF, *whose face is grimly set.* CHLOE *has never moved.* MRS. HILLCRIST *whispers to her husband.*

AUCTIONEER. Five thousand eight hundred bid. For five thousand eight hundred. Come along, gen'lemen, come along. We're not beaten. Thank you, sir. [HORNBLOWER] Five thousand nine hundred. And—? [DAWKER] Six thousand. Six thousand bid. Six thousand bid. For six thousand! The Centry—most desirable spot in the county—going for the low price of six thousand.

HILLCRIST. [*Muttering*] Low! Heavens!

AUCTIONEER. Any advance on six thousand? Come, gen'lemen, we haven't dried up? A little spirit. Six thousand? For six thousand? For six thousand pounds? Very well, I'm selling. For six thousand once—[*He taps*] For six thousand twice—[*He taps*].

JILL. [*Low*] Oh! we've got it!

AUCTIONEER. And one, sir? [HORNBLOWER] Six thousand one hundred bid.

The SOLICITOR *touches his arm and says something, to which the* AUCTIONEER *responds with a nod.*

MRS. H. Blow your nose, Jack.

[HILLCRIST *blows his nose.*

AUCTIONEER. For six thousand one hundred. [DAWKER] And two. Thank you. [HORNBLOWER] And three. For six thousand three hundred. [DAWKER] And four. For six thousand four hundred pounds. This coveted property. For six thousand four hundred pounds. Why, it's giving it away, gen'lemen. [*A pause.*

MRS. H. Giving!

AUCTIONEER. Six thousand four hundred bid. [HORNBLOWER] And five. [DAWKER] And six. [HORNBLOWER] And seven. [DAWKER] And eight.

A pause, during which, through the door Left, someone beckons to the SOLICITOR, *who rises and confers.*

HILLCRIST. [*Muttering*] I've done if that doesn't get it.

AUCTIONEER. For six thousand eight hundred. For six thousand eight hundred—once—[*He taps*] twice—[*He taps*] For the last time. This dominating site. [HORNBLOWER] And nine. Thank you. For six thousand nine hundred.

[HILLCRIST *has taken out his handkerchief.*

JILL. Oh! Dodo!

MRS. H. [*Quivering*] Don't give in!

AUCTIONEER. Seven thousand may I say? [DAWKER] Seven thousand.

MRS. H. [*Whispers*] Keep it down; don't show him.

AUCTIONEER. For seven thousand—going for seven

thousand—once—[*Taps*] twice—[*Taps*] [HORNBLOWER] And one. Thank you, sir.

HILLCRIST *blows his nose.* JILL, *with a choke, leans back in her seat and folds her arms tightly on her chest.* MRS. HILLCRIST *passes her handkerchief over her lips, sitting perfectly still.* HILLCRIST, *too, is motionless.*

The AUCTIONEER *has paused, and is talking to the* SOLICITOR, *who has returned to his seat.*

MRS. H. Oh! Jack.

JILL. Stick it, Dodo; stick it!

AUCTIONEER. Now, gen'lemen, I have a bid of seven thousand one hundred for the Centry. And I'm instructed to sell if I can't get more. It's a fair price, but not a big price. [*To his friend* MR. SPICER] A thumpin' price? [*With his smile*] Well, you're a judge of thumpin', I admit. Now, who'll give me seven thousand two hundred? What, no one? Well, I can't make you, gen'lemen. For seven thousand one hundred. Once—[*Taps*] Twice—[*Taps*].

[JILL *utters a little groan.*

HILLCRIST. [*Suddenly, in a queer voice*] Two.

AUCTIONEER. [*Turning with surprise and looking up to receive* HILLCRIST'S *nod*] Thank *you*, sir. And two. Seven thousand two hundred. [*He screws himself round so as to command both* HILLCRIST *and* HORNBLOWER] May I have yours, sir? [HORNBLOWER] And three. [HILLCRIST] And four. Seven thousand four hundred. For seven thousand four hundred. [HORNBLOWER] Five. [HILLCRIST] Six. For seven thousand six hundred. [*A*

pause] Well, gen'lemen, this is better, but a record property shid fetch a record price. The possibilities are enormous. [HORNBLOWER] Eight thousand did you say, sir? Eight thousand. Going for eight thousand pounds. [HILLCRIST] And one. [HORNBLOWER] And two. [HILLCRIST] And three. [HORNBLOWER] And four. [HILLCRIST] And five. For eight thousand five hundred. A wonderful property for eight thousand five hundred. [*He wipes his brow.*

JILL. [*Whispering*] Oh, Dodo!

MRS. H. That's enough, Jack, we must stop some time.

AUCTIONEER. For eight thousand five hundred. Once—[*Taps*] Twice—[*Taps*] [HORNBLOWER] Six hundred. [HILLCRIST] Seven. May I have yours, sir? [HORNBLOWER] Eight.

HILLCRIST. Nine thousand.

MRS. HILLCRIST *looks at him, biting her lips, but he is quite absorbed.*

AUCTIONEER. Nine thousand for this astounding property. Why, the Duke would pay that if he realised he'd be overlooked. Now, sir? [*To* HORNBLOWER. *No response*]. Just a little raise on that. [*No response.*] For nine thousand. The Centry, Deepwater, for nine thousand. Once—[*Taps*] Twice—[*Taps*].

JILL. [*Under her breath*] Ours!

A VOICE. [*From far back in the centre*] And five hundred.

AUCTIONEER. [*Surprised and throwing out his arms towards the voice*] And five hundred. For nine thou-

sand five hundred. May I have yours, sir? [*He looks at* HORNBLOWER. *No response.*]

[*The* SOLICITOR *speaks to him.*

MRS. H. [*Whispering*] It must be the Duke again.

HILLCRIST. [*Passing his hand over his brow*] That's stopped him, anyway.

AUCTIONEER. [*Looking at* HILLCRIST] For nine thousand five hundred? [HILLCRIST *shakes his head.*] Once more. The Centry, Deepwater, for nine thousand five hundred. Once—[*Taps*] Twice—[*Taps*] [*He pauses and looks again at* HORNBLOWER *and* HILLCRIST] For the last time—at nine thousand five hundred. [*Taps*] [*With a look towards the bidder*] Mr. Smalley. Well! [*With great satisfaction*] That's that! No more to-day, gen'lemen.

The AUCTIONEER *and* SOLICITOR *busy themselves. The room begins to empty.*

MRS. H. Smalley? Smalley? *Is* that the Duke's agent? Jack!

HILLCRIST. [*Coming out of a sort of coma, after the excitement he has been going through*] What! What!

JILL. Oh, Dodo! How splendidly you stuck it!

HILLCRIST. Phew! What a squeak! I was clean out of my depth. A mercy the Duke chipped in again.

MRS. H. [*Looking at* ROLF *and* CHLOE, *who are standing up as if about to go*] Take care; they can hear you. Find Dawker, Jack.

Below, the AUCTIONEER *and* SOLICITOR *take up their papers, and move out Left.*

HILLCRIST *stretches himself, standing up, as*

if to throw off the strain. The door behind is opened, and HORNBLOWER *appears.*

HORNBLOWER. Ye ran me up a pretty price. Ye bid very pluckily, Hillcrist. But ye didn't quite get my measure.

HILLCRIST. Oh! It was *my* nine thousand the Duke capped. Thank God, the Centry's gone to a gentleman!

HORNBLOWER. The Duke? [*He laughs*] No, the Centry's not gone to a gentleman, nor to a fool. It's gone to me.

HILLCRIST. What!

HORNBLOWER. I'm sorry for ye; ye're not fit to manage these things. Well, it's a monstrous price, and I've had to pay it because of your obstinacy. I shan't forget that when I come to build.

HILLCRIST. D'you mean to say that bid was for you?

HORNBLOWER. Of course I do. I told ye I was a bad man to be up against. Perhaps ye'll believe me now.

HILLCRIST. A dastardly trick!

HORNBLOWER. [*With venom*] What did ye call it—a skin game? Remember we're playin' a skin game, Hillcrist.

HILLCRIST. [*Clenching his fists*] If we were younger men——

HORNBLOWER. Ay! 'Twouldn't look pretty for us to be at fisticuffs. We'll leave the fightin' to the young ones. [*He glances at* ROLF *and* JILL; *suddenly throwing*

out his finger at ROLF] No makin' up to that young woman! I've watched ye. And as for you, missy, you leave my boy alone.

JILL. [*With suppressed passion*] Dodo, may I spit in his eye or something?

HILLCRIST. Sit down.

JILL *sits down. He stands between her and* HORNBLOWER.

You've won this round, sir, by a foul blow. We shall see whether you can take any advantage of it. I believe the law can stop you ruining my property.

HORNBLOWER. Make your mind easy; it can't. I've got ye in a noose, and I'm goin' to hang ye.

MRS. H. [*Suddenly*] Mr. Hornblower, as you fight foul—so shall we.

HILLCRIST. Amy!

MRS. H. [*Paying no attention*] And it will not be foul play towards you and yours. You are outside the pale.

HORNBLOWER. That's just where I am, outside *your* pale all round ye. Ye're not long for Deepwater, ma'am. Make your dispositions to go; ye'll be out in six months, I prophesy. And good riddance to the neighbourhood. [*They are all down on the level now.*

CHLOE. [*Suddenly coming closer to* MRS. HILLCRIST] Here are your salts, thank you. Father, can't you—?

HORNBLOWER. [*Surprised*] Can't I what?

CHLOE. Can't you come to an arrangement?

MRS. H. Just so, Mr. Hornblower. Can't you?

HORNBLOWER. [*Looking from one to the other*] As

we're speakin' out, ma'am, it's your behaviour to my daughter-in-law—who's as good as you—and better, to my thinking—that's more than half the reason why I've bought this property. Ye've fair got my dander up. Now it's no use to bandy words. It's very forgivin' of ye, Chloe, but come along!

MRS. H. Quite seriously, Mr. Hornblower, you had better come to an arrangement.

HORNBLOWER. Mrs. Hillcrist, ladies should keep to their own business.

MRS. H. I will.

HILLCRIST. Amy, do leave it to us men. You young man [*He speaks to* ROLF] do you support your father's trick this afternoon?

JILL *looks round at* ROLF, *who tries to speak, when* HORNBLOWER *breaks in.*

HORNBLOWER. *My* trick? And what d'ye call it, to try and put me own son against me?

JILL. [*To* ROLF] Well?

ROLF. I don't, but——

HORNBLOWER. Trick? Ye young cub, be quiet. Mr. Hillcrist had an agent bid for him—I had an agent bid for me. Only his agent bid at the beginnin', an' mine bid at the end. What's the trick in that?

[*He laughs.*

HILLCRIST. Hopeless; we're in different worlds.

HORNBLOWER. I wish to God we were! Come you, Chloe. And you, Rolf, you follow. In six months I'll have those chimneys up, and me lorries runnin' round ye.

MRS. H. Mr. Hornblower, if you build——

HORNBLOWER. [*Looking at* MRS. HILLCRIST] Ye know—it's laughable. Ye make me pay nine thousand five hundred for a bit o' land not worth four, and ye think I'm not to get back on ye. I'm goin' on with as little consideration as if ye were a family of blackbeetles. Good afternoon!

ROLF. Father!

JILL. Oh, Dodo! He's obscene.

HILLCRIST. Mr. Hornblower, my compliments.

HORNBLOWER, *with a stare at* HILLCRIST'S *half-smiling face, takes* CHLOE'S *arm, and half drags her towards the door on the Left. But there, in the opened doorway, are standing* DAWKER *and a* STRANGER. *They move just out of the way of the exit, looking at* CHLOE, *who sways and very nearly falls.*

HORNBLOWER. Why! Chloe! What's the matter?

CHLOE. I don't know; I'm not well to-day.

[*She pulls herself together with a great effort.*

MRS. H. [*Who has exchanged a nod with* DAWKER *and the* STRANGER] Mr. Hornblower, you build at your peril. I warn you.

HORNBLOWER. [*Turning round to speak*] Ye think yourself very cool and very smart. But I doubt this is the first time ye've been up against realities. Now, I've been up against them all my life. Don't talk to me, ma'am, about peril and that sort of nonsense; it makes no impression. Your husband called me pachydermatous. I don't know Greek, and Latin, and all

that, but I've looked it out in the dictionary, and I find it means thick-skinned. And I'm none the worse for that when I have to deal with folk like you. Good afternoon.

He draws CHLOE *forward, and they pass through the door, followed quickly by* ROLF.

MRS. H. Thank you, Dawker.

She moves up to DAWKER *and the* STRANGER, *Left, and they talk.*

JILL. Dodo! It's awful!

HILLCRIST. Well, there's nothing for it now but to smile and pay up. Poor old home! It shall be his wash-pot. Over the Centry will he cast his shoe. By Gad, Jill, I could cry!

JILL. [*Pointing*] Look! Chloe's sitting down. She nearly fainted just now. It's something to do with Dawker, Dodo, and that man with him. Look at mother! Ask them!

HILLCRIST. Dawker!

DAWKER *comes to him, followed by* MRS. HILLCRIST.

What's the mystery about young Mrs. Hornblower?

DAWKER. No mystery.

HILLCRIST. Well, what is it?

MRS. H. You'd better not ask.

HILLCRIST. I wish to know.

MRS. H. Jill, go out and wait for us.

JILL. Nonsense, mother!

MRS. H. It's not for a girl to hear.

JILL. Bosh! I read the papers every day.

DAWKER. It's nothin' worse than you get there, anyway.

MRS. H. Do you wish your daughter——

JILL. It's ridiculous, Dodo; you'd think I was mother at my age.

MRS. H. I was not so proud of my knowledge.

JILL. No, but you had it, dear.

HILLCRIST. What is it—what is it? Come over here, Dawker.

DAWKER *goes to him, Right, and speaks in a low voice.*

What! [*Again* DAWKER *speaks in a low voice.* Good God!

MRS. H. Exactly!

JILL. Poor thing—whatever it is!

MRS. H. Poor thing?

JILL. What went before, mother?

MRS. H. It's what's coming after that matters, luckily.

HILLCRIST. How do you know this?

DAWKER. My friend here [*He points to the* STRANGER] was one of the agents.

HILLCRIST. It's shocking. I'm sorry I heard it.

MRS. H. I told you not to.

HILLCRIST. Ask your friend to come here.

DAWKER *beckons, and the* STRANGER *joins the group.*

Are you sure of what you've said, sir?

STRANGER. Perfectly. I remember her quite well; her name then was——

HILLCRIST. I don't want to know, thank you. I'm

truly sorry. I wouldn't wish the knowledge of that about his womenfolk to my worst enemy. This mustn't be spoken of. [JILL *hugs his arm.*

MRS. H. It will not be if Mr. Hornblower is wise. If he is not wise, it must be spoken of.

HILLCRIST. I say no, Amy. I won't have it. It's a dirty weapon. Who touches pitch shall be defiled.

MRS. H. Well, what weapons does he use against us? Don't be quixotic. For all we can tell, they know it quite well already, and if they don't they ought to. Anyway, to know this is our salvation, and we must use it.

JILL. [*Sotto voce*] Pitch! Dodo! Pitch!

DAWKER. The threat's enough! J.P.—Chapel—Future member for the constituency——

HILLCRIST. [*A little more doubtfully*] To use a piece of knowledge about a woman—it's repugnant. I—I won't do it.

MRS. H. If you had a son tricked into marrying such a woman, would you wish to remain ignorant of it?

HILLCRIST. [*Struck*] I don't know—I don't know.

MRS. H. At least you'd like to be in a position to help him, if you thought it necessary?

HILLCRIST. Well—that—perhaps.

MRS. H. Then you agree that Mr. Hornblower at least should be told. What he does with the knowledge is not our affair.

HILLCRIST. [*Half to the* STRANGER *and half to* DAWKER] Do you realise that an imputation of that kind may be ground for a criminal libel action?

STRANGER. Quite. But there's no shadow of doubt; not the faintest. You saw her just now?

HILLCRIST. I did. [*Revolting again*] No; I don't like it.

DAWKER *has drawn the* STRANGER *a step or two away, and they talk together.*

MRS. H. [*In a low voice*] And the ruin of our home? You're betraying your fathers, Jack.

HILLCRIST. I can't bear bringing a woman into it.

MRS. H. We don't. If anyone brings her in, it will be Hornblower himself.

HILLCRIST. We use her secret as a lever.

MRS. H. I tell you quite plainly: I will only consent to holding my tongue about her, if you agree to Hornblower being told. It's a scandal to have a woman like that in the neighbourhood.

JILL. Mother means that, father.

HILLCRIST. Jill, keep quiet. This is a very bitter position. I can't tell what to do.

MRS. H. You must use this knowledge. You owe it to me—to us all. You'll see that when you've thought it over.

JILL. [*Softly*] Pitch, Dodo, pitch!

MRS. H. [*Furiously*] Jill, be quiet!

HILLCRIST. I was brought up never to hurt a woman. I can't do it, Amy—I can't do it. I should never feel like a gentleman again.

MRS. H. [*Coldly*] Oh! Very well.

HILLCRIST. What d'you mean by that?

MRS. H. I shall use the knowledge in my own way.

HILLCRIST. [*Staring at her*] You would—against my wishes?

MRS. H. I consider it my duty.

HILLCRIST. If I agree to Hornblower being told——

MRS. H. That's all I want.

HILLCRIST. It's the utmost I'll consent to, Amy; and don't let's have any humbug about its being morally necessary. We do it to save our skins.

MRS. H. I don't know what you mean by humbug?

JILL. He means humbug, mother.

HILLCRIST. It must stop at old Hornblower. Do you quite understand?

MRS. H. Quite.

JILL. Will it stop?

MRS. H. Jill, if you can't keep your impertinence to yourself——

HILLCRIST. Jill, come with me.

[*He turns towards door, Back.*

JILL. I'm sorry, mother. Only it *is* a skin game, isn't it?

MRS. H. You pride youself on plain speech, Jill. I pride myself on plain thought. You will thank me afterwards that I can see realities. I know we are better people than these Hornblowers. Here we are going to stay, and they—are not.

JILL. [*Looking at her with a sort of unwilling admiration*] Mother, you're wonderful!

HILLCRIST. Jill!

JILL. Coming, Dodo.

She turns and runs to the door. They go out.

MRS. HILLCRIST, *with a long sigh, draws herself up, fine and proud.*

MRS. H. DAWKER! [*He comes to her.* I shall send him a note to-night, and word it so that he will be bound to come and see us to-morrow morning. Will you be in the study just before eleven o'clock, with this gentleman?

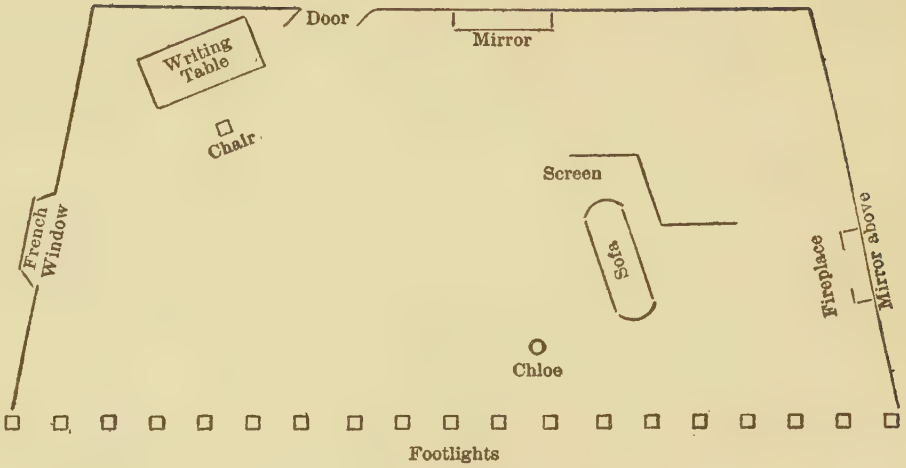
DAWKER. [*Nodding*] We're going to wire for his partner. I'll bring him too. Can't make too sure.

[*She goes firmly up the steps and out.*

DAWKER. [*To the* STRANGER, *with a wink*] The Squire's squeamish—too much of a gentleman. But he don't count. The grey mare's all right. You wire to Henry. I'm off to our solicitors. We'll make that old rhinoceros sell us back the Centry at a decent price. These Hornblowers—[*Laying his finger on his nose*] We've got 'em!

CURTAIN

ACT II. Scene II.



SCENE II

CHLOE'S *boudoir at half-past seven the same evening. A pretty room. No pictures on the walls, but two mirrors. A screen and a luxurious couch on the fireplace side, stage Left. A door rather Right of Centre Back, opening inwards. A French window, Right forward. A writing table, Right Back. Electric light burning.*

CHLOE, *in a tea-gown, is standing by the forward end of the sofa, very still, and very pale. Her lips are parted, and her large eyes stare straight before them as if seeing ghosts. The door is opened noiselessly and a* WOMAN'S *face is seen. It peers at* CHLOE, *vanishes, and the door is closed.* CHLOE *raises her hands, covers her eyes with them, drops them with a quick gesture, and looks round her. A knock. With a swift movement she slides on to the sofa, and lies prostrate, with eyes closed.*

CHLOE. [*Feebly*] Come in!

Her MAID *enters; a trim, contained figure of uncertain years, in a black dress, with the face which was peering in.*

Yes, Anna?

ANNA. Aren't you going in to dinner, ma'am?

CHLOE. [*With closed eyes*] No.

ANNA. Will you take anything here, ma'am?

CHLOE. I'd like a biscuit and a glass of champagne.

The MAID, *who is standing between sofa and door, smiles.* CHLOE, *with a swift look, catches the smile.*

Why do you smile?

ANNA. Was I, ma'am?

CHLOE. You know you were. [*Fiercely*] Are you paid to smile at me?

ANNA. [*Immovable*] No, ma'am. Would you like some eau de Cologne on your forehead?

CHLOE. Yes.—No.—What's the good? [*Clasping her forehead*] My headache won't go.

ANNA. To keep lying down's the best thing for it.

CHLOE. I have been—hours.

ANNA. [*With the smile*] Yes, ma'am.

CHLOE. [*Gathering herself up on the sofa*] Anna! Why do you do it?

ANNA. Do what, ma'am?

CHLOE. Spy on me.

ANNA. I—never! I——!

CHLOE. To spy! You're a fool, too. What is there to spy on?

ANNA. Nothing, ma'am. Of course, if you're not satisfied with me, I must give notice. Only—if I were spying, I should expect to have notice given me. I've been accustomed to ladies who wouldn't stand such a thing for a minute.

CHLOE. [*Intently*] Well, you'll take a month's wages and go to-morrow. And that's all, now.

[ANNA *inclines her head and goes out.*

CHLOE, *with a sort of moan, turns over and buries her face in the cushion.*

CHLOE. [*Sitting up*] If I could see that man—if only —or Dawker——

She springs up and goes to the door, but hesitates, and comes back to the head of the sofa, as ROLF *comes in. During this scene the door is again opened stealthily, an inch or two.*

ROLF. How's the head?

CHLOE. Beastly, thanks. I'm not going in to dinner.

ROLF. Is there anything I can do for you?

CHLOE. No, dear boy. [*Suddenly looking at him*] You don't want this quarrel with the Hillcrists to go on, do you, Rolf?

ROLF. No; I hate it.

CHLOE. Well, I think I *might* be able to stop it. Will you slip round to Dawker's—it's not five minutes—and ask him to come and see me.

ROLF. Father and Charlie wouldn't——

CHLOE. I know. But if he comes to the window here while you're at dinner, I'll let him in, and out, and nobody'd know.

ROLF. [*Astonished*] Yes, but what—I mean how——

CHLOE. Don't ask me. It's worth the shot—that's all. [*Looking at her wrist-watch*] To this window at eight o'clock exactly. First long window on the terrace, tell him.

ROLF. It's nothing Charlie would mind?

CHLOE. No; only I can't tell him—he and father are so mad about it all.

ROLF. If there's a real chance——

CHLOE. [*Going to the window and opening it*] This way, Rolf. If you don't come back I shall know he's coming. Put your watch by mine. [*Looking at his watch*] It's a minute fast, see!

ROLF. Look here, Chloe——

CHLOE. Don't wait; go on.

She almost pushes him out through the window, closes it after him, draws the curtains again, stands a minute, thinking hard; goes to the bell and rings it; then, crossing to the writing table, Right Back, she takes out a chemist's prescription.

[ANNA *comes in.*

CHLOE. I don't want that champagne. Take this to the chemist and get him to make up some of these cachets quick, and bring them back yourself.

ANNA. Yes, ma'am; but you have some.

CHLOE. They're too old; I've taken two—the strength's out of them. Quick, please; I can't stand this head.

ANNA. [*Taking the prescription—with her smile*] Yes, ma'am. It'll take some time—you don't want me?

CHLOE. No; I want the cachets. [ANNA *goes out.*

CHLOE *looks at her wrist-watch, goes to the writing-table, which is old-fashioned, with a secret drawer, looks round her, dives at the secret drawer, takes out a roll of notes and a tissue paper parcel. She counts the notes: "Three hundred." Slips them into her breast*

and unwraps the little parcel. It contains pearls. She slips them, too, into her dress, looks round startled, replaces the drawer, and regains her place on the sofa, lying prostrate as the door opens, and HORNBLOWER *comes in. She does not open her eyes, and he stands looking at her a moment before speaking.*

HORNBLOWER. [*Almost softly*] How are ye feelin', Chloe?

CHLOE. Awful head!

HORNBLOWER. Can ye attend a moment? I've had a note from that woman. [CHLOE *sits up.*

HORNBLOWER. [*Reading*] "I have something of the utmost importance to tell you in regard to your daughter-in-law. I shall be waiting to see you at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. The matter is so utterly vital to the happiness of all your family, that I cannot imagine you will fail to come." Now, what's the meaning of it? Is it sheer impudence, or lunacy, or what?

CHLOE. I don't know.

HORNBLOWER. [*Not unkindly*] Chloe, if there's anything—ye'd better tell me. Forewarned's forearmed.

CHLOE. There's nothing; unless it's—[*With a quick look at him*]—Unless it's that my father was a—a bankrupt.

HORNBLOWER. Hech! Many a man's been that. Ye've never told us much about your family.

CHLOE. I wasn't very proud of him.

HORNBLOWER. Well, ye're not responsible for your father. If that's all, it's a relief. The bitter snobs! I'll remember it in the account I've got with them.

CHLOE. Father, don't say anything to Charlie; it'll only worry him for nothing.

HORNBLOWER. Na, no, I'll not. If *I* went bankrupt, it'd upset Chearlie, I've not a doubt. [*He laughs. Looking at her shrewdly*] There's nothing else, before I answer her? [CHLOE *shakes her head.* Ye're sure?

CHLOE. [*With an effort*] She may invent things, of course.

HORNBLOWER. [*Lost in his feud feeling*] Ah! but there's such a thing as the laws o' slander. If they play pranks, I'll have them up for it.

CHLOE. [*Timidly*] Couldn't you stop this quarrel, father? You said it was on my account. But *I* don't want to know them. And they do love their old home. I like the girl. You don't really need to build just there, do you? Couldn't you stop it? Do!

HORNBLOWER. Stop it? Now I've bought? Na, no! The snobs defied me, and I'm going to show them. I hate the lot of them, and I hate that little Dawker worst of all.

CHLOE. He's only their agent.

HORNBLOWER. He's a part of the whole dog-in-the-manger system that stands in my way. Ye're a woman, and ye don't understand these things. Ye wouldn't believe the struggle I've had to make my money and get my position. These county folk talk soft sawder,

but to get anything from them's like gettin' butter out of a dog's mouth. If they could drive me out of here by fair means or foul, would they hesitate a moment? Not they! See what they've made me pay; and look at this letter. Selfish, mean lot o' hypocrites!

CHLOE. But they didn't begin the quarrel.

HORNBLOWER. Not openly; but underneath they did —that's their way. They began it by thwartin' me here and there and everywhere, just because I've come into me own a bit later than they did. I gave 'em their chance, and they wouldn't take it. Well, I'll show 'em what a man like me can do when he sets his mind to it. I'll not leave much skin on them.

In the intensity of his feeling he has lost sight of her face, alive with a sort of agony of doubt, whether to plead with him further, or what to do. Then, with a swift glance at her wrist-watch, she falls back on the sofa and closes her eyes.

It'll give me a power of enjoyment seein' me chimneys go up in front of their windies. That was a bonnie thought—that last bid o' mine. He'd got that roused up, I believe he never would a' stopped. [*Looking at her*] I forgot your head. Well, well, ye'll be best lyin' quiet. [*The gong sounds.*

Shall we send ye something in from dinner?

CHLOE. No; I'll try to sleep. Please tell them I don't want to be disturbed.

HORNBLOWER. All right. I'll just answer this note.

[*He sits down at her writing-table.*

CHLOE *starts up from the sofa feverishly, looking at her watch, at the window, at her watch; then softly crosses to the window and opens it.*

HORNBLOWER. [*Finishing*] Listen! [*He turns round towards the sofa*] Hallo! Where are ye?

CHLOE. [*At the window*] It's so hot.

HORNBLOWER. Here's what I've said:

> "MADAM,—You can tell me nothing of my daughter-in-law which can affect the happiness of my family. I regard your note as an impertinence, and I shall not be with you at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning.
>
> "Yours truly——"

CHLOE. [*With a suffering movement of her head*] Oh! —Well!—— [*The gong is touched a second time.*

HORNBLOWER. [*Crossing to the door*] Lie ye down, and get a sleep. I'll tell them not to disturb ye; and I hope ye'll be all right to-morrow. Good-night, Chloe.

CHLOE. Good-night. [*He goes out.*

After a feverish turn or two, CHLOE *returns to the open window and waits there, half screened by the curtains. The door is opened inch by inch, and* ANNA'S *head peers round. Seeing where* CHLOE *is, she slips in and passes behind the screen, Left. Suddenly* CHLOE *backs in from the window.*

CHLOE. [*In a low voice*] Come in.

[*She darts to the door and locks it.*

DAWKER *has come in through the window and stands regarding her with a half smile.*

DAWKER. Well, young woman, what do you want of me?

In the presence of this man of her own class, there comes a distinct change in CHLOE'S *voice and manner; a sort of frank commonness, adapted to the man she is dealing with, but she keeps her voice low.*

CHLOE. You're making a mistake, you know.

DAWKER. [*With a broad grin*] No. I've got a memory for faces.

CHLOE. I say you are.

DAWKER. [*Turning to go*] If that's all, you needn't 'ave troubled me to come.

CHLOE. No. Don't go! [*With a faint smile*] You *are* playing a game with me. Aren't you ashamed? What harm have I done you? Do you call this cricket?

DAWKER. No, my girl—business.

CHLOE. [*Bitterly*] What have I to do with this quarrel? I couldn't help their falling out.

DAWKER. That's your misfortune.

CHLOE. [*Clasping her hands*] You're a cruel fellow if you can spoil a woman's life who never did you an ounce of harm.

DAWKER. So they *don't* know about you. That's all right. Now, look here, I serve my employer. But I'm flesh and blood, too, and I always give as good as I get. I hate this family of yours. There's no name too bad for 'em to call me this last month, and no

looks too black to give me. I tell you frankly, I hate 'em.

CHLOE. There's good in them same as in you.

DAWKER. [*With a grin*] There's no good Hornblower but a dead Hornblower.

CHLOE. But—but I'm *not* one.

DAWKER. You'll be the mother of some, I shouldn't wonder.

CHLOE. [*Stretching out her hand—pathetically*] Oh! leave me alone, do! I'm happy here. Be a sport! Be a sport!

DAWKER. [*Disconcerted for a second*] You can't get at me, so don't try it on.

CHLOE. I had such a bad time in old days.

DAWKER *shakes his head; his grin has disappeared and his face is like wood.*

CHLOE. [*Panting*] Ah! do! You might! You've been fond of some woman, I suppose. Think of her!

DAWKER. [*Decisively*] It won't do, Mrs. Chloe. You're a pawn in the game, and I'm going to use you.

CHLOE. [*Despairingly*] What is it to you? [*With a sudden touch of the tigress*] Look here! Don't you make an enemy of me. I haven't dragged through hell for nothing. Women like me can bite, I tell you.

DAWKER. That's better. I'd rather have a woman threaten than whine, any day. Threaten away! You'll let 'em know that you met me in the Promenade one night. Of course you'll let 'em know that, won't you?—or that——

CHLOE. Be quiet! Oh! Be quiet! [*Taking from her bosom the notes and the pearls*] Look! There's my savings—there's all I've got! The pearls'll fetch nearly a thousand. [*Holding it out to him*] Take it, and drop me out—won't you? Won't you?

DAWKER. [*Passing his tongue over his lips—with a hard little laugh*] You mistake your man, missis. I'm a plain dog, if you like, but I'm faithful, and I hold fast. Don't try those games on me.

CHLOE. [*Losing control*] You're a beast!—a beast! a cruel, cowardly beast! And how dare you bribe that woman here to spy on me? Oh! yes, you do; you know you do. If you drove me mad, you wouldn't care. You beast!

DAWKER. Now, don't carry on! That won't help you.

CHLOE. What d'you call it—to dog a woman down like this, just because you happen to have a quarrel with a man?

DAWKER. Who made the quarrel? Not me, missis. *You* ought to know that in a row it's the weak and helpless—we won't say the innocent—that get it in the neck. That can't be helped.

CHLOE. [*Regarding him intently*] I hope your mother or your sister, if you've got any, may go through what I'm going through ever since you got on my track. I hope they'll know what fear means. I hope they'll love and find out that it's hanging on a thread, and—and—— Oh! you coward, you persecuting coward! Call yourself a man!

DAWKER. [*With his grin*] Ah! You look quite pretty like that. By George! you're a handsome woman when you're roused.

CHLOE'S *passion fades out as quickly as it blazed up. She sinks down on the sofa, shudders, looks here and there, and then for a moment up at him.*

CHLOE. Is there *anything* you'll take, not to spoil my life? [*Clasping her hands on her breast; under her breath*] Me?

DAWKER. [*Wiping his brow*] By God! That's an offer. [*He recoils towards the window*] You—you touched me there. Look here! I've got to use you and I'm going to use you, but I'll do my best to let you down as easy as I can. No, I don't want anything you can give me—that is—[*He wipes his brow again*] I'd like it—but I won't take it.

[CHLOE *buries her face in her hands.*

There! Keep your pecker up; don't cry. Good-night!

[*He goes through the window.*

CHLOE. [*Springing up*] Ugh! Rat in a trap! Rat——!

She stands listening; flies to the door, unlocks it, and, going back to the sofa, lies down and closes her eyes. CHARLES *comes in very quietly and stands over her, looking to see if she is asleep. She opens her eyes.*

CHARLES. Well, Clo! Had a sleep, old girl?

CHLOE. Ye—es.

CHARLES. [*Sitting on the arm of the sofa and caressing her*] Feel better, dear?

CHLOE. Yes, better, Charlie.

CHARLES. That's right. Would you like some soup?

CHLOE. [*With a shudder*] No.

CHARLES. I say—what gives you these heads? You've been very on and off all this last month.

CHLOE. I don't know. Except that—except that I *am* going to have a child, Charlie.

CHARLES. After all! By Jove! Sure?

CHLOE. [*Nodding*] Are you glad?

CHARLES. Well—I suppose I am. The guv'nor will be mighty pleased, anyway.

CHLOE. Don't tell him—yet.

CHARLES. All right! [*Bending over and drawing her to him*] My poor girl, I'm so sorry you're seedy. Give us a kiss.

CHLOE *puts up her face and kisses him passionately.*

I say, you're like fire. You're not feverish?

CHLOE. [*With a laugh*] It's a wonder if I'm not. Charlie, are you happy with me?

CHARLES. What do you think?

CHLOE. [*Leaning against him*] You wouldn't easily believe things against me, would you?

CHARLES. What! Thinking of those Hillcrists? What the hell that woman means by her attitude towards you—— When I saw her there to-day, I had all my work cut out not to go up and give her a bit of my mind.

CHLOE. [*Watching him stealthily*] It's not good for me, now I'm like this. It's upsetting me, Charlie.

CHARLES. Yes; and we won't forget. We'll make 'em pay for it.

CHLOE. It's wretched in a little place like this. I say, must you go on spoiling their home?

CHARLES. The woman cuts you and insults you. That's enough for me.

CHLOE. [*Timidly*] Let her. *I* don't care; I can't bear feeling enemies about, Charlie, I—get nervous—I——

CHARLES. My dear girl! What is it?

[*He looks at her intently.*

CHLOE. I suppose it's—being like this. [*Suddenly*] But, Charlie, do stop it for my sake. Do, do!

CHARLES. [*Patting her arm*] Come, come; I say, Chloe! You're making mountains. See things in proportion. Father's paid nine thousand five hundred to get the better of those people, and you want him to chuck it away to save a woman who's insulted you. That's not sense, and it's not business. Have some pride.

CHLOE. [*Breathless*] I've got no pride, Charlie. I want to be quiet—that's all.

CHARLES. Well, if the row gets on your nerves, I can take you to the sea. But you ought to enjoy a fight with people like that.

CHLOE. [*With calculated bitterness*] No, it's nothing, of course—what *I* want.

CHARLES. Hallo! Hallo! You *are* on the jump!

CHLOE. If you want me to be a good wife to you, make father stop it.

CHARLES. [*Standing up*] Now, look here, Chloe, what's behind this?

CHLOE. [*Faintly*] Behind?

CHARLES. You're carrying on as if—as if you were really scared! We've *got* these people. We'll have them out of Deepwater in six months. It's absolute ruination to their beastly old house; we'll put the chimneys on the very edge, not three hundred yards off, and our smoke'll be drifting over them half the time. You won't have this confounded stuck-up woman here much longer. And then we can really go ahead and take our proper place. So long as she's here, we shall never do that. We've only to drive on now as fast as we can.

CHLOE. [*With a gesture*] I see.

CHARLES. [*Again looking at her*] If you go on like this, you know, I shall begin to think there's something you——

CHLOE [*softly*] Charlie! [*He comes to her.* Love me!

CHARLES. [*Embracing her*] There, old girl! I know women are funny at these times. You want a good night, that's all.

CHLOE. You haven't finished dinner, have you? Go back, and I'll go to bed quite soon. Charlie, don't stop loving me.

CHARLES. Stop? Not much.

While he is again embracing her, ANNA *steals from behind the screen to the door, opens it noiselessly, and passes through, but it clicks as she shuts it.*

CHLOE. [*Starting violently*] Oh—h!

CHARLES. What is it? What is it? You are nervy, my dear.

CHLOE. [*Looking round with a little laugh*] I don't know. Go on, Charlie. I'll be all right when this head's gone.

CHARLES. [*Stroking her forehead and looking at her doubtfully*] You go to bed; I won't be late coming up.

He turns and goes, blowing a kiss from the doorway. When he is gone, CHLOE *gets up and stands in precisely the attitude in which she stood at the beginning of the Act, thinking, and thinking. And the door is opened, and the face of the* MAID *peers round at her.*

CURTAIN

ACT III

ACT III

SCENE I

Morning

Hillcrist's *study next morning.*

Jill, coming from Left, looks in at the open French window.

Jill. [*Speaking to* Rolf, *invisible*] Come in here. There's no one.

She goes in. Rolf *joins her, coming from the garden.*

Rolf. Jill, I just wanted to say—Need we?

[Jill *nods.*

Seeing you yesterday—it did seem rotten.

Jill. *We* didn't begin it.

Rolf. No; but you don't understand. If you'd made yourself, as father has——

Jill. I hope I should be sorry.

Rolf. [*Reproachfully*] That isn't like you. Really he can't help thinking he's a public benefactor.

Jill. And we can't help thinking he's a pig. Sorry!

Rolf. If the survival of the fittest is right——

Jill. He may be fitter, but he's not going to survive.

Rolf. [*Distracted*] It looks like it, though.

Jill. Is that all you came to say?

ROLF. No. Suppose we joined, couldn't we stop it?

JILL. I don't feel like joining.

ROLF. We *did* shake hands.

JILL. One can't fight and not grow bitter.

ROLF. *I* don't feel bitter.

JILL. Wait; you'll feel it soon enough.

ROLF. Why? [*Attentively*] About Chloe? I do think your mother's manner to her is——

JILL. Well?

ROLF. Snobbish. [JILL *laughs.* She may not be your class; and that's just why it's snobbish.

JILL. I think you'd better shut up.

ROLF. What my father said was true; your mother's rudeness to her that day she came here, has made both him and Charlie ever so much more bitter.

[JILL *whistles the Habanera from "Carmen."* [*Staring at her, rather angrily*] Is it a whistling matter?

JILL. No.

ROLF. I suppose you want me to go?

JILL. Yes.

ROLF. All right. Aren't we ever going to be friends again?

JILL. [*Looking steadily at him*] I don't expect so.

ROLF. That's very—horrible.

JILL. Lots of horrible things in the world.

ROLF. It's our business to make them fewer, Jill.

JILL. [*Fiercely*] Don't be moral.

ROLF. [*Hurt*] That's the last thing I want to be. I only want to be friendly.

JILL. Better be real first.

ROLF. From the big point of view——

JILL. There isn't any. We're all out for our own. And why not?

ROLF. By jove, you have got——

JILL. Cynical? Your father's motto—"Every man for himself." That's the winner—hands down. Good-bye!

ROLF. Jill! Jill!

JILL. [*Putting her hands behind her back, hums*]—

"If auld acquaintance be forgot
And days of auld lang syne"——

ROLF. Don't!

With a pained gesture he goes out towards Left, through the French window.

JILL, *who has broken off the song, stands with her hands clenched and her lips quivering.*

[FELLOWS *enters Left.*

FELLOWS. Mr. Dawker, Miss, and two gentlemen.

JILL. Let the three gentlemen in, and me out.

[*She passes him and goes out Left.*

And immediately DAWKER *and the* TWO STRANGERS *come in.*

FELLOWS. I'll inform Mrs. Hillcrist, sir. The Squire is on his rounds. [*He goes out Left.*

The THREE MEN *gather in a discreet knot at the big bureau, having glanced at the two doors and the open French window.*

DAWKER. Now this may come into Court, you know. If there's a screw loose anywhere, better men-

tion it. [*To* SECOND STRANGER] You knew her personally?

SECOND S. What do you think? I don't take girls on trust for that sort of job. She came to us highly recommended, too; and did her work very well. It was a double stunt—to make sure—wasn't it, George?

FIRST S. Yes; we paid her for the two visits.

SECOND S. I should know her in a minute; striking looking girl; had something in her face. Daresay she'd seen hard times.

FIRST S. We don't want publicity.

DAWKER. Not likely. The threat'll do it; but the stakes are heavy—and the man's a slogger; we must be able to push it home. If you can both swear to her, it'll do the trick.

SECOND S. And about—I mean, we're losing time, you know, coming down here.

DAWKER. [*With a nod at* FIRST STRANGER] George here knows me. That'll be all right. I'll guarantee it well worth your while.

SECOND S. I don't want to do the girl harm, if she's married.

DAWKER. No, no; nobody wants to hurt *her*. We just want a cinch on this fellow till he squeals.

They separate a little as MRS. HILLCRIST *enters from Right.*

DAWKER. Good morning, ma'am. My friend's partner. Hornblower coming?

MRS. H. At eleven. I had to send up a second note, Dawker.

DAWKER. Squire not in?

MRS. H. I haven't told him.

DAWKER. [*Nodding*] Our friends might go in here [*Pointing Right*] and we can use 'em as we want 'em.

MRS. H. [*To the* STRANGERS] Will you make yourselves comfortable?

She holds the door open, and they pass her into the room, Right.

DAWKER. [*Showing document*] I've had this drawn and engrossed. Pretty sharp work. Conveys the Centry, *and* Longmeadow, to the Squire at four thousand five hundred. Now, ma'am, suppose Hornblower puts his hand to that, he'll have been done in the eye, and six thousand all told out o' pocket. You'll have a very nasty neighbour here.

MRS. H. But we shall still have the power to disclose that secret at any time.

DAWKER. Yeh! But things might happen here you could never bring home to him. You can't trust a man like that. He isn't goin' to forgive *me*, I know.

MRS. H. [*Regarding him keenly*] But if he signs, we couldn't honourably——

DAWKER. No, ma'am, *you* couldn't; and I'm sure *I* don't want to do that girl a hurt. I just mention it because, of course, you can't guarantee that it doesn't get out.

MRS. H. Not absolutely, I suppose.

A look passes between them, which neither of them has quite sanctioned.

There's his car. It always seems to make more noise than any other.

DAWKER. He'll kick and flounder—but you leave

him to ask what you want, ma'am; don't mention this [*He puts the deed back into his pocket*]. The Centry's no mortal good to him if he's not going to put up works; I should say he'd be glad to save what he can.

MRS. HILLCRIST *inclines her head.* FELLOWS *enters Left.*

FELLOWS. [*Apologetically*] Mr. Hornblower, ma'am; by appointment, he says.

MRS. H. Quite right, Fellows.

HORNBLOWER *comes in, and* FELLOWS *goes out.*

HORNBLOWER. [*Without salutation*] I've come to ask ye point blank what ye mean by writing me these letters. [*He takes out two letters*] And we'll discuss it in the presence of nobody, if ye please.

MRS. H. Mr. Dawker knows all that I know, and more.

HORNBLOWER. Does he? Very well! Your second note says that my daughter-in-law has lied to me. Well, I've brought her, and what ye've got to say—if it's not just a trick to see me again—ye'll say to her face. [*He takes a step towards the window.*

MRS. H. Mr. Hornblower, you had better decide that after hearing what it is—we shall be quite ready to repeat it in her presence; but we want to do as little harm as possible.

HORNBLOWER. [*Stopping*] Oh! ye do! Well, what lies have ye been hearin'? Or what have ye made up? You and Mr. Dawker? Of course ye know there's a law of libel and slander. I'm not the man to stop at that.

MRS. H. [*Calmly*] Are you familiar with the law of divorce, Mr. Hornblower?

HORNBLOWER. [*Taken aback*] No, I'm not. That is——

MRS. H. Well, you know that misconduct is required. And I suppose you've heard that cases are arranged.

HORNBLOWER. I know it's all very shocking—what about it?

MRS. H. When cases are arranged, Mr. Hornblower, the man who is to be divorced often visits an hotel with a strange woman. I am extremely sorry to say that your daughter-in-law, before her marriage, was in the habit of being employed as such a woman.

HORNBLOWER. Ye dreadful creature!

DAWKER. [*Quickly*] All proved, up to the hilt!

HORNBLOWER. I don't believe a word of it. Ye're lyin' to save your skins. How dare ye tell me such monstrosities? Dawker, I'll have ye in a criminal court.

DAWKER. Rats! You saw a gent with me yesterday? Well, *he's* employed her.

HORNBLOWER. A put-up job! Conspiracy!

MRS. H. Go and get your daughter-in-law.

HORNBLOWER. [*With the first sensation of being in a net*] It's a foul shame—a lying slander!

MRS. H. If so, it's easily disproved. Go and fetch her.

HORNBLOWER. [*Seeing them unmoved*] I will. I don't believe a word of it.

MRS. H. I hope you are right.

HORNBLOWER *goes out by the French window,* DAWKER *slips to the door Right, opens it, and speaks to those within.* MRS. HILLCRIST *stands moistening her lips, and passing her handkerchief over them.* HORNBLOWER *returns, preceding* CHLOE, *strung up to hardness and defiance.*

HORNBLOWER. Now then, let's have this impudent story torn to rags.

CHLOE. What story?

HORNBLOWER. That you, my dear, were a woman—it's too shockin'—I don't know how to tell ye——

CHLOE. Go on!

HORNBLOWER. Were a woman that went with men, to get them their divorce.

CHLOE. Who says that?

HORNBLOWER. That lady [*Sneering*] there, and her bull-terrier here.

CHLOE. [*Facing* MRS. HILLCRIST] That's a charitable thing to say, isn't it?

MRS. H. Is it true?

CHLOE. No.

HORNBLOWER. [*Furiously*] There! I'll have ye both on your knees to her!

DAWKER. [*Opening the door, Right*] Come in.

The FIRST STRANGER *comes in.* CHLOE, *with a visible effort, turns to face him.*

FIRST S. How do you do, Mrs. Vane?

CHLOE. I don't know you.

FIRST S. Your memory is bad, ma'am. You knew me yesterday well enough. One day is not a long time, nor are three years.

CHLOE. Who *are* you?

FIRST S. Come, ma'am, come! The Custer case.

CHLOE. I don't know you, I say. [*To* MRS. HILLCRIST] How can you be so vile?

FIRST S. Let me refresh your memory, ma'am. [*Producing a notebook*] Just on three years ago: "Oct. 3. To fee and expenses Mrs. Vane with Mr. C——, Hotel Beaulieu, Twenty pounds. Oct. 10, Do., Twenty pounds." [*To* HORNBLOWER] Would you like to glance at this book, sir? You'll see they're genuine entries.

HORNBLOWER makes a motion to do so, but checks himself and looks at CHLOE.

CHLOE. [*Hysterically*] It's all lies—lies!

FIRST S. Come, ma'am, we wish you no harm.

CHLOE. Take me away. I won't be treated like this.

MRS. H. [*In a low voice*] Confess.

CHLOE. Lies!

HORNBLOWER. Were ye ever called Vane?

CHLOE. No, never.

She makes a movement towards the window, but DAWKER *is in the way, and she halts.*

FIRST S. [*Opening the door, Right*] Henry.

The SECOND STRANGER *comes in quickly. At sight of him* CHLOE *throws up her hands, gasps, breaks down, stage Left, and stands covering her face with her hands. It is so*

complete a confession that HORNBLOWER *stands staggered; and, taking out a coloured handkerchief, wipes his brow.*

DAWKER. Are you convinced?

HORNBLOWER. Take those men away.

DAWKER. If you're not satisfied, we can get other evidence; plenty.

HORNBLOWER. [*Looking at* CHLOE] That's enough. Take them out. Leave me alone with her.

[DAWKER *takes them out Right.*

MRS. HILLCRIST *passes* HORNBLOWER *and goes out at the window.* HORNBLOWER *moves down a step or two towards* CHLOE.

HORNBLOWER. My God!

CHLOE. [*With an outburst*] Don't tell Charlie! Don't tell Charlie!

HORNBLOWER. Chearlie! So that was your manner of life. [CHLOE *utters a moaning sound.* So that's what ye got out of by marryin' into my family! Shame on ye, ye Godless thing!

CHLOE. Don't tell Charlie!

HORNBLOWER. And that's all ye can say for the wreck ye've wrought. My family, my works, my future! How dared ye!

CHLOE. If you'd been me!——

HORNBLOWER. An' these Hillcrists. The skin game of it!

CHLOE. [*Breathless*] Father!

HORNBLOWER. Don't call me that, woman!

CHLOE. [*Desperate*] I'm going to have a child.

HORNBLOWER. God! Ye are!

CHLOE. Your grandchild. For the sake of it, do what these people want; and don't tell anyone—*Don't tell Charlie!*

HORNBLOWER. [*Again wiping his forehead*] A secret between us. I don't know that I can keep it. It's horrible. Poor Chearlie!

CHLOE. [*Suddenly fierce*] You must keep it, you shall! I won't have him told. Don't make me desperate! I can be—I didn't live that life for nothing.

HORNBLOWER. [*Staring at her revealed in a new light*] Ay; ye look a strange, wild woman, as I see ye. And we thought the world of ye!

CHLOE. I love Charlie; I'm faithful to him. I can't live without him. You'll never forgive me, I know; but Charlie——! [*Stretching out her hands.*

HORNBLOWER makes a bewildered gesture with his large hands.

HORNBLOWER. I'm all at sea here. Go out to the car and wait for me.

[CHLOE *passes him and goes out, Left.*

[*Muttering to himself*] So I'm down! Me enemies put their heels upon me head! Ah! but we'll see yet!

He goes up to the window and beckons towards the Right.

[MRS. HILLCRIST *comes in.*

What d'ye want for this secret?

MRS. H. Nothing.

HORNBLOWER. Indeed! Wonderful!—the trouble ye've taken for—nothing.

MRS. H. If you harm us we shall harm you. Any use whatever of the Centry——

HORNBLOWER. For which ye made me pay nine thousand five hundred pounds.

MRS. H. We will buy it from you.

HORNBLOWER. At what price?

MRS. H. The Centry at the price Miss Mullins would have taken at first, and Longmeadow at the price you gave us—four thousand five hundred altogether.

HORNBLOWER. A fine price, and me six thousand out of pocket. Na, no! I'll keep it and hold it over ye. Ye daren't tell this secret so long as I've got it.

MRS. H. No, Mr. Hornblower. On second thoughts, you *must* sell. You broke your word over the Jackmans. We can't trust you. We would rather have our place here ruined at once, than leave you the power to ruin it as and when you like. You will sell us the Centry and Longmeadow now, or you know what will happen.

HORNBLOWER. [*Writhing*] I'll not. It's blackmail.

MRS. H. Very well then! Go your own way and we'll go ours. There is no witness to this conversation.

HORNBLOWER. [*Venomously*] By heaven, ye're a clever woman. Will ye swear by Almighty God that you and your family, and that agent of yours, won't breathe a word of this shockin' thing to mortal soul.

MRS. H. Yes, if you sell.

HORNBLOWER. Where's Dawker?

MRS. H. [*Going to the door, Right*] Mr. Dawker!

[DAWKER *comes in.*

HORNBLOWER. I suppose ye've got your iniquity ready. [DAWKER *grins and produces the document.* It's mighty near conspiracy, this. Have ye got a Testament?

MRS. H. My word will be enough, Mr. Hornblower.

HORNBLOWER. Ye'll pardon me—I can't make it solemn enough for you.

MRS. H. Very well; here is a Bible.

[*She takes a small Bible from the bookshelf.*

DAWKER. [*Spreading document on bureau*] This is a short conveyance of the Centry and Longmeadow—recites sale to you by Miss Mullins of the first, John Hillcrist of the second, and whereas you have agreed for the sale to said John Hillcrist, for the sum of four thousand five hundred pounds, in consideration of the said sum, receipt whereof, you hereby acknowledge you do convey all that, etc. Sign here. I'll witness.

HORNBLOWER. [*To* MRS. HILLCRIST] Take that Book in your hand, and swear first. I swear by Almighty God never to breathe a word of what I know concerning Chloe Hornblower to any living soul.

MRS. H. No, Mr. Hornblower; you will please sign first. *We* are not in the habit of breaking our words.

HORNBLOWER, *after a furious look at them, seizes a pen, runs his eye again over the deed, and signs,* DAWKER *witnessing.*

To that oath, Mr. Hornblower, we shall add the words, "So long as the Hornblower family do us no harm."

HORNBLOWER. [*With a snarl*] Take it in your hands, both of ye, and together swear.

MRS. H. [*Taking the Book*] I swear that I will

breathe no word of what I know concerning Chloe Hornblower to any living soul, so long as the Hornblower family do us no harm.

DAWKER. I swear that too.

MRS. H. I engage for my husband.

HORNBLOWER. Where are those two fellows?

DAWKER. Gone. It's no business of theirs.

HORNBLOWER. It's no business of any of ye what has happened to a woman in the past. Ye know that. Good-day!

He gives them a deadly look, and goes out, Left, followed by DAWKER.

MRS. H. [*With her hand on the Deed*] Safe!

HILLCRIST *enters at the French window, followed by* JILL.

[*Holding up the Deed*] Look! He's just gone! I told you it was only necessary to use the threat. He caved in and signed this; we are sworn to say nothing. We've beaten him. [HILLCRIST *studies the Deed.*

JILL. [*Awed*] We saw Chloe in the car. How did she take it, mother?

MRS. H. Denied, then broke down when she saw our witnesses. I'm glad you were not here, Jack.

JILL. [*Suddenly*] I shall go and see her.

MRS. H. Jill, you will *not;* you don't know what she's done.

JILL. I shall. She must be in an awful state.

HILLCRIST. My dear, you can do her no good.

JILL. I think I can, Dodo.

MRS. H. You don't understand human nature.

We're enemies for life with those people. You're a little donkey if you think anything else.

JILL. I'm going, all the same.

MRS. H. Jack, forbid her.

HILLCRIST. [*Lifting an eyebrow*] Jill, be reasonable.

JILL. Suppose I'd taken a knock like that, Dodo, I'd be glad of friendliness from someone.

MRS. H. You never *could* take a knock like *that.*

JILL. You don't know what you can do till you try, mother.

HILLCRIST. Let her go, Amy. I'm sorry for that young woman.

MRS. H. You'd be sorry for a man who picked your pocket, I believe.

HILLCRIST. I certainly should! Deuced little he'd get out of it, when I've paid for the Centry.

MRS. H. [*Bitterly*] Much gratitude I get for saving you both our home!

JILL. [*Disarmed*] Oh! Mother, we *are* grateful. Dodo, show your gratitude.

HILLCRIST. Well, my dear, it's an intense relief. I'm not good at showing my feelings, as you know. What d'you want me to do? Stand on one leg and crow?

JILL. *Yes,* Dodo, yes! Mother, hold him while I— [*Suddenly she stops, and all the fun goes out of her*] No! I can't—I can't help thinking of *her.*

CURTAIN *falls for a Minute.*

SCENE II

EVENING

When it rises again, the room is empty and dark, save for moonlight coming in through the French window, which is open.

The figure of CHLOE, *in a black cloak, appears outside in the moonlight; she peers in, moves past, comes back, hesitatingly enters. The cloak, fallen back, reveals a white evening dress; and that magpie figure stands poised watchfully in the dim light, then flaps unhappily Left and Right, as if she could not keep still. Suddenly she stands listening.*

ROLF'S VOICE. [*Outside*] Chloe! Chloe!

[*He appears.*

CHLOE. [*Going to the window*] What are you doing here?

ROLF. What are *you?* I only followed you.

CHLOE. Go away!

ROLF. What's the matter? Tell me!

CHLOE. Go away, and don't say anything. Oh! The roses! [*She has put her nose into some roses in a bowl on a big stand close to the window*] Don't they smell lovely?

ROLF. What did Jill want this afternoon?

CHLOE. I'll tell you nothing. Go away!

ROLF. I don't like leaving you here in this state.

CHLOE. What state? I'm all right. Wait for me down in the drive, if you want to.

[ROLF *starts to go, stops, looks at her, and does go.*

CHLOE, *with a little moaning sound, flutters again, magpie-like, up and down, then stands by the window listening. Voices are heard, Left. She darts out of the window and away to the Right, as* HILLCRIST *and* JILL *come in. They have turned up the electric light, and come down in front of the fireplace, where* HILLCRIST *sits in an armchair, and* JILL *on the arm of it. They are in undress evening attire.*

HILLCRIST. Now, tell me.

JILL. There isn't much, Dodo. I was in an awful funk for fear I should meet any of the others, and of course I did meet Rolf, but I told him some lie, and he took me to her room—boudoir, they call it—isn't boudoir a "dug-out" word?

HILLCRIST. [*Meditatively*] The sulking room. Well?

JILL. She was sitting like this. [*She buries her chin in her hands, with her elbows on her knees*] And she said in a sort of fierce way: "What do you want?" And I said: "I'm awfully sorry, but I thought you might like it."

HILLCRIST. Well?

JILL. She looked at me hard, and said: "I suppose you know all about it." And I said: "Only vaguely,"

because of course I don't. And she said: "Well, it was decent of you to come." Dodo, she looks like a lost soul. What has she done?

HILLCRIST. She committed her real crime when she married young Hornblower without telling him. She came out of a certain world to do it.

JILL. Oh! [*Staring in front of her*] Is it very awful in that world, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. [*Uneasy*] I don't know, Jill. Some can stand it, I suppose; some can't. I don't know which sort she is.

JILL. One thing I'm sure of: she's awfully fond of Chearlie.

HILLCRIST. That's bad; that's very bad.

JILL. And she's frightened, horribly. I think she's desperate.

HILLCRIST. Women like that are pretty tough, Jill; don't judge her too much by your own feelings.

JILL. No; only— Oh! it was beastly; and of course I dried up.

HILLCRIST. [*Feelingly*] H'm! One always does. But perhaps it was as well; you'd have been blundering in a dark passage.

JILL. I just said: "Father and I feel awfully sorry; if there's anything we can do——"

HILLCRIST. That was risky, Jill.

JILL. [*Disconsolately*] I had to say something. I'm glad I went, anyway. I feel more human.

HILLCRIST. We *had* to fight for our home. I should have felt like a traitor if I hadn't.

JILL. I'm not *enjoying* home to-night, Dodo.

HILLCRIST. I never could hate properly; it's a confounded nuisance.

JILL. Mother's fearfully bucked, and Dawker's simply oozing triumph. I *don't* trust him, Dodo; he's too —not pugilistic—the other one with a pug—naceous.

HILLCRIST. He is rather.

JILL. I'm sure he wouldn't care tuppence if Chloe committed suicide.

HILLCRIST. [*Rising uneasily*] Nonsense! Nonsense!

JILL. I wonder if mother would.

HILLCRIST. [*Turning his face towards the window*] What's that? I thought I heard—[*Louder*] Is there anybody out there?

No answer. JILL *springs up and runs to the window.*

JILL. You! [*She dives through to the Right, and returns, holding* CHLOE'S *hand and drawing her forward*] Come in! It's only us! [*To* HILLCRIST] Dodo!

HILLCRIST. [*Flustered, but making a show of courtesy*] Good evening! Won't you sit down?

JILL. Sit down; you're all shaky.

She makes CHLOE *sit down in the armchair, out of which they have risen, then locks the door, and closing the windows, draws the curtains hastily over them.*

HILLCRIST. [*Awkward and expectant*] Can I do anything for you?

CHLOE. I couldn't bear it—he's coming to ask you——

HILLCRIST. Who?

CHLOE. My husband. [*She draws in her breath with a long shudder, then seems to seize her courage in her hands*] I've got to be quick. He keeps on asking—he knows there's something.

HILLCRIST. Make your mind easy. We shan't tell him.

CHLOE. [*Appealing*] Oh! that's not enough. Can't you tell him something to put him back to thinking it's all right? I've done him such a wrong. I didn't realise till after—I thought meeting him was just a piece of wonderful good luck, after what I'd been through. I'm not such a bad lot—not really.

She stops from the over-quivering of her lips. JILL, *standing beside the chair, strokes her shoulder.* HILLCRIST *stands very still, painfully biting at a finger.*

You see, my father went bankrupt, and I was in a shop till——

HILLCRIST. [*Soothingly, and to prevent disclosures*] Yes, yes; yes, yes!

CHLOE. I never gave a man away or did anything I was ashamed of—at least—I mean, I had to make my living in all sorts of ways, and then I met Charlie.

Again she stopped from the quivering of her lips.

JILL. It's all right.

CHLOE. He thought I was respectable, and that was such a relief, you can't think, so—so I let him.

JILL. Dodo! It's awful!

HILLCRIST. It is!

CHLOE. And after I married him, you see, I fell in love. If I had before, perhaps I wouldn't have dared—only, I don't know—you never know, do you? When there's a straw going, you catch at it.

JILL. Of course you do.

CHLOE. And now, you see, I'm going to have a child.

JILL. [*Aghast*] Oh! *Are* you?

HILLCRIST. Good God!

CHLOE. [*Dully*] I've been on hot bricks all this month, ever since—that day here. I knew it was in the wind. What gets in the wind never gets out. [*She rises and throws out her arms*] Never! It just blows here and there [*Desolately*] and then blows home. [*Her voice changes to resentment*] But I've paid for being a fool—'tisn't fun, that sort of life, I can tell you. I'm not ashamed and repentant, and all that. If it wasn't for him! I'm afraid he'll never forgive me; it's such a disgrace for him—and then, to have his child! Being fond of him, I feel it much worse than anything I ever felt, and that's saying a good bit. It is.

JILL. [*Energetically*] Look here! He simply mustn't find out.

CHLOE. That's it; but it's started, and he's bound to keep on because he knows there's something. A man isn't going to be satisfied when there's something he suspects about his wife. Charlie wouldn't—never. He's clever, and he's jealous; and he's coming here.

[*She stops, and looks round wildly, listening.*

JILL. Dodo, what can we say to put him clean off the scent?

HILLCRIST. Anything in reason.

CHLOE. [*Catching at this straw*] You will! You see, I don't know what I'll do. I've got soft, being looked after—he does love me. And if he throws me off, I'll go under—that's all.

HILLCRIST. Have you any suggestion?

CHLOE. [*Eagerly*] The only thing is to tell him something positive, something he'll believe, that's not *too* bad—like my having been a lady clerk with those people who came here, and having been dismissed on suspicion of taking money. I could get him to believe that wasn't true.

JILL. Yes; and it isn't—that's splendid! You'd be able to put such conviction into it. Don't you think so, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Anything I can. I'm deeply sorry.

CHLOE. Thank you. And don't say I've been here, will you? He's very suspicious. You see, he knows that his father has re-sold that land to you; that's what he can't make out—that, and my coming here this morning; he knows something's being kept from him; and he noticed that man with Dawker yesterday. And my maid's been spying on me. It's in the air. He puts two and two together. But I've told him there's nothing he need worry about; nothing that's true.

HILLCRIST. What a coil!

CHLOE. I'm very honest and careful about money. So he won't believe that about me, and the old man wants to keep it from Charlie, I know.

HILLCRIST. That does seem the best way out.

CHLOE. [*With a touch of defiance*] I'm a true wife to him.

JILL. Of course we know that.

HILLCRIST. It's all unspeakably sad. Deception's horribly against the grain—but——

CHLOE. [*Eagerly*] When I deceived him, I'd have deceived God Himself—I was so desperate. You've never been right down in the mud. You can't understand what I've been through.

HILLCRIST. Yes, yes. I daresay I'd have done the same. I should be the last to judge——

[CHLOE *covers her eyes with her hands.*

There, there! Cheer up!

[*He puts his hand on her arm.*

JILL. [*To herself*] Darling Dodo!

CHLOE. [*Starting*] There's somebody at the door. I must go; I must go.

She runs to the window and slips through the curtains.

[*The handle of the door is again turned.*

JILL. [*Dismayed*] Oh! It's locked—I forgot.

She springs to the door, unlocks and opens it, while HILLCRIST *goes to the bureau and sits down.*

It's all right, Fellows; I was only saying something rather important.

FELLOWS. [*Coming in a step or two and closing the door behind him*] Certainly, Miss. Mr. Charles 'Ornblower is in the hall. Wants to see you, sir, or Mrs. Hillcrist.

JILL. What a bore! Can you see him, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Er—yes. I suppose so. Show him in here, Fellows.

As FELLOWS *goes out,* JILL *runs to the window, but has no time to do more than adjust the curtains and spring over to stand by her father, before* CHARLES *comes in. Though in evening clothes, he is white and dishevelled for so spruce a young man.*

CHARLES. Is my wife here?

HILLCRIST. No, sir.

CHARLES. Has she been?

HILLCRIST. This morning, I believe, Jill?

JILL. Yes, she came this morning.

CHARLES. [*Staring at her*] I know that—*now*, I mean?

JILL. No. [HILLCRIST *shakes his head.*

CHARLES. Tell me what was said this morning.

HILLCRIST. I was not here this morning.

CHARLES. Don't try to put me off. I know too much. [*To* JILL] You.

JILL. Shall I, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. No; I will. Won't you sit down?

CHARLES. No. Go on.

HILLCRIST. [*Moistening his lips*] It appears, Mr. Hornblower, that my agent, Mr. Dawker——

CHARLES, *who is breathing hard, utters a sound of anger.*

—that my agent happens to know a firm, who in old days employed your wife. I should greatly prefer not

to say any more, especially as we don't believe the story.

JILL. No; we don't.

CHARLES. Go on!

HILLCRIST. [*Getting up*] Come! If I were you, I should refuse to listen to anything against my wife.

CHARLES. Go on, I tell you.

HILLCRIST. You insist? Well, they say there was some question about the accounts, and your wife left them under a cloud. As I told you, we don't believe it.

CHARLES. [*Passionately*] Liars!

[He makes a rush for the door.

HILLCRIST. [*Starting*] What did you say?

JILL. [*Catching his arm*] Dodo! [*Sotto voce*] We are, you know.

CHARLES. [*Turning back to them*] Why do you tell me that lie? When I've just had the truth out of that little scoundrel! My wife's been here; she put you up to it.

The face of CHLOE *is seen transfixed between the curtains, parted by her hands.*

She—she put you up to it. Liar that she is—a living lie. For three years a living lie!

HILLCRIST, *whose face alone is turned towards the curtains, sees that listening face. His hand goes up from uncontrollable emotion.*

And hasn't now the pluck to tell me. I've done with her. I won't own a child by such a woman.

With a little sighing sound CHLOE *drops the curtain and vanishes.*

HILLCRIST. For God's sake, man, think of what you're saying. She's in great distress.

CHARLES. And what am I?

JILL. She loves you, you know.

CHARLES. Pretty love! That scoundrel Dawker told me—told me— Horrible! Horrible!

HILLCRIST. I deeply regret that our quarrel should have brought this about.

CHARLES. [*With intense bitterness*] Yes, you've smashed my life.

Unseen by them, MRS. HILLCRIST *has entered and stands by the door, Left.*

MRS. H. Would you have wished to live on in ignorance? [*They all turn to look at her.*

CHARLES. [*With a writhing movement*] I don't know. But—*you*—*you* did it.

MRS. H. You shouldn't have attacked us.

CHARLES. What did we do to you—compared with this?

MRS. H. All you could.

HILLCRIST. Enough, enough! What can we do to help you?

CHARLES. Tell me where my wife is.

JILL *draws the curtains apart—the window is open—*JILL *looks out. They wait in silence.*

JILL. We don't know.

CHARLES. Then she *was* here?

HILLCRIST. Yes, sir; and she heard you.

CHARLES. All the better if she did. She knows how I feel.

HILLCRIST. Brace up; be gentle with her.

CHARLES. Gentle? A woman who—who——

HILLCRIST. A most unhappy creature. Come!

CHARLES. Damn your sympathy!

He goes out into the moonlight, passing away, Left.

JILL. Dodo, we ought to look for her; I'm awfully afraid.

HILLCRIST. I saw her there—listening. With child! Who knows where things end when they once begin? To the gravel pit, Jill; I'll go to the pond. No, we'll go together. [*They go out.*

MRS. HILLCRIST *comes down to the fireplace, rings the bell and stands there, thinking.* FELLOWS *enters.*

MRS. H. I want someone to go down to Mr. Dawker's.

FELLOWS. Mr. Dawker is here, ma'am, waitin' to see you.

MRS. H. Ask him to come in. Oh! and Fellows, you can tell the Jackmans that they can go back to their cottage.

FELLOWS. Very good, ma'am. [*He goes out.*

MRS. HILLCRIST *searches at the bureau, finds and takes out the deed.* DAWKER *comes in; he has the appearance of a man whose temper has been badly ruffled.*

MRS. H. Charles Hornblower—how did it happen?

DAWKER. He came to me. I said I knew nothing. He wouldn't take it; went for me, abused me up hill

and down dale; said he knew everything, and then he began to threaten me. Well, I lost my temper, and I told him.

MRS. H. That's very serious, Dawker, after our promise. My husband is most upset.

DAWKER. [*Sullenly*] It's not my fault, ma'am; he shouldn't have threatened and goaded me on. Besides, it's got out that there's a scandal; common talk in the village—not the facts, but quite enough to cook their goose here. They'll have to go. Better have done with it, anyway, than have enemies at your door.

MRS. H. Perhaps; but— Oh! Dawker, take charge of this. [*She hands him the deed*] These people are desperate—and—I'm not sure of my husband when his feelings are worked on.

[*The sound of a car stopping.*

DAWKER. [*At the window, looking to the Left*] Hornblower's, I think. Yes, he's getting out.

MRS. H. [*Bracing herself*] You'd better wait, then.

DAWKER. He mustn't give me any of his sauce; I've had enough.

The door is opened and HORNBLOWER *enters, pressing so on the heels of* FELLOWS *that the announcement of his name is lost.*

HORNBLOWER. Give me that deed! Ye got it out of me by false pretences and treachery. Ye swore that nothing should be heard of this. Why! me own servants know!

MRS. H. That has nothing to do with us. Your son came and wrenched the knowledge out of Mr. Dawker by abuse and threats; that is all. You will

kindly behave yourself here, or I shall ask that you be shown out.

HORNBLOWER. Give me that deed, I say! [*He suddenly turns on* DAWKER] Ye little ruffian, I see it in your pocket.

The end indeed is projecting from DAWKER'S *breast pocket.*

DAWKER. [*Seeing red*] Now, look 'ere, 'Ornblower, I stood a deal from your son, and I'll stand no more.

HORNBLOWER. [*To* MRS. HILLCRIST] I'll ruin your place yet! [*To* DAWKER] Ye give me that deed, or I'll throttle ye.

He closes on DAWKER, *and makes a snatch at the deed.* DAWKER *springs at him, and the two stand swaying, trying for a grip at each other's throats.* MRS. HILLCRIST *tries to cross and reach the bell, but is shut off by their swaying struggle.*

Suddenly ROLF *appears in the window, looks wildly at the struggle, and seizes* DAWKER'S *hands, which have reached* HORNBLOWER'S *throat.* JILL, *who is following, rushes up to him and clutches his arm.*

JILL. Rolf! All of you! Stop! Look!

DAWKER'S *hand relaxes, and he is swung round.* HORNBLOWER *staggers and recovers himself, gasping for breath. All turn to the window, outside which in the moonlight* HILLCRIST *and* CHARLES HORNBLOWER *have* CHLOE'S *motionless body in their arms.*

In the gravel pit. She's just breathing; that's all.

MRS. H. Bring her in. The brandy, Jill!

HORNBLOWER. No. Take her to the car. Stand back, young woman! I want no help from any of ye. Rolf—Chearlie—take her up.

They lift and bear her away, Left. JILL *follows.*

Hillcrist, ye've got me beaten and disgraced hereabouts, ye've destroyed my son's married life, and ye've killed my grandchild. I'm not staying in this cursed spot, but if ever I can do you or yours a hurt, I will.

DAWKER. [*Muttering*] That's right. Squeal and threaten. You began it.

HILLCRIST. Dawker, have the goodness! Hornblower, in the presence of what may be death, with all my heart I'm sorry.

HORNBLOWER. Ye hypocrite!

He passes them with a certain dignity, and goes out at the window, following to his car.

HILLCRIST, *who has stood for a moment stock-still, goes slowly forward and sits in his swivel chair.*

MRS. H. Dawker, please tell Fellows to telephone to Dr. Robinson to go round to the Hornblowers *at once.*

DAWKER, *fingering the deed, and with a noise that sounds like* "The cur!" *goes out, Left.*

[*At the fireplace*] Jack! Do you blame me?

HILLCRIST. [*Motionless*] No.

MRS. H. Or Dawker? He's done his best.

HILLCRIST. No.

MRS. H. [*Approaching*] What is it?

HILLCRIST. Hypocrite!

[JILL *comes running in at the window.*

JILL. Dodo, she's moved; she's spoken. It may not be so bad.

HILLCRIST. Thank God for that!

[FELLOWS *enters, Left.*

FELLOWS. The Jackmans, ma'am.

HILLCRIST. Who? What's this?

The JACKMANS *have entered, standing close to the door.*

MRS. J. We're so glad we can go back, sir—ma'am, we just wanted to thank you.

There is a silence. They see that they are not welcome.

Thank you kindly, sir. Good-night, ma'am.

[*They shuffle out.*

HILLCRIST. I'd forgotten their existence. [*He gets up*] What is it that gets loose when you begin a fight, and makes you what you think you're not? What blinding evil! Begin as you may, it ends in this—skin game! Skin game!

JILL. [*Rushing to him*] It's not you, Dodo; it's not you, beloved Dodo.

HILLCRIST. It is me. For I am, or should be, master in this house!

MRS. H. I don't understand.

HILLCRIST. When we began this fight, we had clean hands—are they clean now? What's gentility worth if it can't stand fire?

CURTAIN

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